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Editorial



Dr. Kafoa Solomone

Dr. Kafoa Solomone is from the Kingdom of Tonga. He was educated in Tonga, New Zealand and Fiji, going on to receive an MA in the United States and a PhD in Belgium. He is now a lecturer at the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji.

Dr. Kafoa is a member of the Editorial Board of PJT.

Land and the identity of a people have always been linked among the ancient peoples of the world, whether they are now 'developed' or 'developing'. The most well known case is that which is brought out in the present crisis in the Middle East between Palestine and Israel. But this is not unique, as struggles around land issues abound throughout the world - in Africa, North America, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and closer home, in Australia, New Zealand (Aotearoa). Last year, the issues of land and identity have erupted into violence within Oceania. Two island nations experienced such agitation, one, in Fiji, resulted in 'civilian' *coup d'état* which was helped by some element in the military; the other, in the Solomon Islands, created two factions of warring groups. A third, the situation in Bougainville, is a while longer, and yet be to totally resolved but it seemed to be different in character. It is a struggle for independence from Papua New Guinea. The land issue, however, unearths a whole lot of other latent contentious issues - money, greed, corruption, power, racial misunderstanding, ignorance, and even downright hatred.

Those involved in these struggles may claim uniqueness for their own. However, they are not so unique once we

look at other incidences of the same kind.

It may be said that the land issue has been used by certain people, with special interests, to get what they want. This is of course pure manipulation. Others may well be struggling for genuine honourable goals.

Here in the Pacific, the troubles seem to be confined to certain peoples of the region - those with no strong central traditional governing structure. However, this does not mean that the issues are not present among those with strong central governing structures. It simply means perhaps that those that have not erupted into violence have found some other means of resolving such contentious issues.

The *Pax Romana* was maintained for the prosperity of the Roman empire. Peace among its people meant continued prosperity especially for the emperor. It was also in this vein that peace among the Christians (Christianity having become the official state religion at the time of Constantine) of the empire meant peace for the rest of civil society. Thus, those like Constantine tried to keep the peace among the disputing factions of the early Christendom by calling councils to resolve churchly disputes.

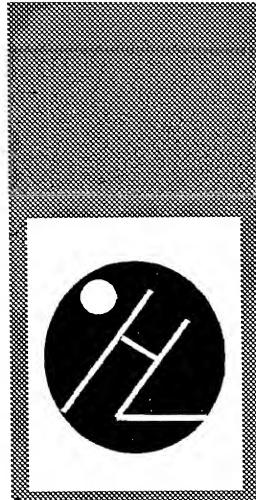
The churches in Oceania today are desperately trying to obtain justice and peace among its members, for the very same people are also the members of the civil society. The churches are a powerful force for most members of the society are adherents of one church or another.

Some of the reasons for the troubles in Solomon Islands and in Fiji are presented in the articles of this issue. Cliff Bird analyses and reflects on the Solomon Islands crisis while Sevati Tuwere and Nacanieli Vakarau approach the situation in Fiji from quite different perspectives; the former is more aligned with general Christian justice and peace principles, the latter expresses views more in line with the thinking of the grassroots whose preoccupation is to do with insecurity in the modern world.

Other shorter articles were part of presentations during a consultation organized by WCC in Suva during the hostage taking of government. They reflect the concern from different parts of the Pacific today and they are offered here as a window to the range of thinking within Oceania about land and who people are.

Remembering the Past for the Future

An Analysis of Fiji's Political Crisis



On May 19th 2000, George Speight and a group of soldiers from the Counter Revolutionary Warfare (CRW) unit walked into Fiji's Parliament and took hostage the Prime Minister and the members of his Coalition government. At his first press conference, the coup leader announced that the coup was staged in the name of the 'cause' and of 'indigenous rights'. In later press conferences, the coup leader declared that the 'Westminster parliamentary democracy model is finished and will be replaced by a *tankei* civilian model of government'. Much has been said since then but no explanation has been forthcoming on the coup leader's view of what constituted the 'cause' or 'indigenous rights'. Central to the current political crisis in Fiji are the issues of ethnicity and ethnic politics, indigenous rights, democracy and the rule of law, traditional leadership, land, the economy and the role of Christianity.

by ECREA
(Ecumenical Centre for
Research, Education &
Advocacy - formerly FCC
Research Group)

For the first two weeks of the hostage crisis, the President, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, tried to solve the situation within the framework of the 1997 Constitution. The invocation of the 'national emergency' decree (on the night of May 19th) gave him executive authority over the country.

However, on May 29th, the military approached the President and requested him to step aside. This, as reported, was done in view of the fact that the President's life was threatened. The military then abrogated by a decree the 1997 Constitution and declared martial law. There were two possible options for the military administration to take in order to deal with the situation. One was the 1997 constitutional process and the other, referred to in the early weeks of the crisis, the *taukei* one. (*taukei* = indigenous Fijian)

The proposal by a group of NGOs to the military administration to form an interim civilian government comprising elected parliamentarians was seen to be in keeping with the 1997 constitutional framework. The question was whether the proposal was viable and practical at that stage. Moreover, the very act of the Chief Justice in drafting the military administration's decrees seemed to lend support to the 'majority' view on the legitimacy of the military administration and the abrogation of the 1997 constitution.

The constitutional option seemed to be the most logical one, but it was not necessarily the most practical. The events of the next five to six weeks of the crisis incited and fuelled hatred and racial violence. Hence, appointing an interim government of elected representatives, which would have Labour party candidates, would have further inflamed the situation. On the other hand, appointing an apolitical interim government would not necessarily mean there would be no repercussions, particularly when they were not elected representatives and were not representative of the fourteen provinces in Fiji.

The second option appeared undemocratic to most Western thinking and to the international community. This option was the one taken by the military administration. By enforcing law and order, they swung public opinion onto their side and hence, their claim to 'legitimacy' was achieved very quickly. But, it is questionable how much legitimacy the military administration enjoyed both internally and externally. This option was claimed as the only realistic framework to solving the hostage crisis. Thus, the inflow of support from the Churches and the majority of the provincial councils to the military administration soon after they took control of the country.



The demands of George Speight in Parliament with some military support were the abrogation of the 1997 constitution, the removal of the person of the President and the granting of amnesty to the hostage takers. These were the conditions for the safe release of the hostages. By meeting these conditions, the military hoped to resolve the hostage crisis quickly and therefore justified their agreement on the above conditions. However, it did not work. The crisis dragged on for a further two months.

The *Muanikau Accord* between the hostage takers and the army was finally signed after months of negotiations; to ensure the safe release of the hostages. But in order to guarantee that the rebel group's objectives would be carried through as well as to ensure their own protection, they demanded an interim administration of their choosing. They in fact wanted a more militant and an ultra-nationalist type of indigenous leadership. This was the major point of contention in the negotiations between the military administration and the rebel group on the interim cabinet line-up. But with no breakthrough on this issue, the military decided to appoint their own interim cabinet. After the first failure to swear in the appointed interim cabinet, it was finally sworn-in in July with a few changes. The primary tasks for the new administration were to put in place mechanisms for economic recovery, address indigenous issues and to review the 1997 Constitution. In addition, the interim administration initiated a new ministry of National Reconciliation under the interim Prime Minister's office.

This political crisis cannot be isolated from its historical background because there are crucial underlying factors - social, political and religious.....

— which are intertwined with, and have been strengthened, through the course of this country's political development, from the colonial period to the period after the 1987 coups. A brief review of that history, will help us better understand the current crisis as well as plan effectively for the future. At the same time, it must be said, at the outset, that this analysis is in no way conclusive. In fact, each of the factors outlined below merits more investigation and analysis on how they are interconnected at the personal, communal and national levels.



Historical Background

Many conflicts around the globe are increasingly linked to the tension between ethnic identity and national identity. This tension is based on the contradiction between the protection of distinct ethnic identities and the desire to create a unified national identity. Ethnic identities themselves continue to be contentious, especially in relation to the question of how far an ethnic boundary must extend and the legitimacy of claims over territories, resources and cultural symbols. Although in many cases, conflict may not be caused by ethnic differences themselves, ethnicity has become a central factor in many disputes, as a mobilisation and legitimisation tool.

In Fiji's case, ethnicity has been conveniently deployed as a means of social organisation, making political and nationalistic demands, excluding and undermining other ethnic groups' interests, and in its extreme form, ethnic cleansing and genocide. The latest persecution of Indo-Fijian rural families and their Indigenous Fijian sympathisers, though on a small scale, is indicative of the emergence of this extreme form.

Since independence, the political system in Fiji has been designed basically to facilitate some sort of ethnic balance, while acknowledging the paramountcy of indigenous people's interests. The post-independence political system was based on the British colonial rule and on the notion of 'divide and rule', which assured a separate system of rule for the indigenous people. The political arrangements, designed by the British colonial administration with the intention of protecting the indigenous Fijian interests gave rise to the emergence of ethnicity and ethnic politics. Durutalo notes,

The relationship between the colonised indigenous Fijians and the British colonisers is ...a partnership that would respect and maintain the interests of Fijian society as paramount vis-à-vis 'rampant Anglo-Saxons' and later Indian economic domination. This view refuses to acknowledge the destructive role of the colonial impact on the indigenous Fijian social structure, including the emergence of ethnicity as an important problem that has come to bedevil present-day Fijian society.¹



Despite having a small population, Fiji's politics are complicated by its complex ethnic make up. Indigenous Fijians were outnumbered by the Indo-Fijians during the 1946 Census. The colonial and indigenous Fijian leaders used this at the time to instil fear in the minds of indigenous Fijians of a possible 'Indian take-over'. Even during the early years, the persistent demand by Indo-Fijians for political representation, urged on by the industrial strikes by Indo-Fijian cane farmers, as in 1920 and 1921, were used by the colonial administration and indigenous Fijian leaders as justification to continue to strengthen communal rule. Communal rule served two purposes; firstly, it was a means of 'divide and rule'; and secondly, it was seen as a means of 'protecting' indigenous interests.²

The Indo-Fijians achieved full franchise and were granted elected representation to the Legislative Council in 1929. Indigenous Fijians were still represented by nominated chiefs until 1961 when they were granted partial franchise. Further constitutional changes took place in succession in 1964 and 1965 when the indigenous Fijians were granted full representation. Under the 1965 electoral arrangements, parliamentary representation was to be roughly 50% indigenous Fijians, and 50% Indo-Fijians but the European over-representation was designed to consolidate their colonial supremacy, and also to keep in check the 'Indo-Fijian threat'.

The 1965 system of parliamentary representation was a result of a compromise between indigenous Fijian leaders and Indo-Fijian leaders for numerical balance in the seat allocation as well as a balance in the manner of representation. Two systems of voting – communal and common rolls – were introduced. The indigenous Fijian leaders, favoured a communal electoral system as a way of maintaining communal solidarity against the 'Indo-Fijian threat'. The Indo-Fijians favoured the establishment of a common roll or 'one person one vote' system, to ensure equal distribution of political power.

While Indo-Fijians advocated independence, indigenous Fijians, who were marginally numerically inferior, feared that independence could mean a possible 'Indian take-over'. But political negotiations between the leaders of the two communities in London in 1969 resulted in the 1970 Constitution which was based on political balance, while maintaining as an underlying principle, the principle of the 'paramountcy' of Fijian interest.

The Alliance Party (AP), whose members were predominantly the chiefs and the elite from both ethnic groups won the first post-independence election in 1972 on the basis of an apparently contradictory philosophy. On one hand it appealed to tradition as a way of mobilising Fijian support, and on the other, it made use of multi-racial rhetoric to mobilise multi-ethnic support. The National Federation Party (NFP) won the 1977 election because of a shift in indigenous Fijian support towards the extremist Fijian Nationalist Party (FNP), away from the middle ground.³ However, due to its inability to form a government, the NFP was not given the chance to rule, as the Governor General, Ratu Sir George Cakobau, an indigenous Fijian high chief, appointed Ratu Mara, the leader of the AP to become Prime Minister. The Alliance won the 1982 elections convincingly but it lost to the Labour Party-National Federation Party Coalition in the 1987 elections.

The new multi-ethnic Coalition government under Dr Timoci Bavadra was overthrown one month after it came into power in the May 14th 1987 military coup, which was led by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. The military was predominantly Fijian and the coup was directed against the multi-ethnic government, which was portrayed by nationalists as an 'Indian' government.

The coup brought to the surface an important issue which has underpinned Fiji politics for so long.

*Indigenous Fijians generally believed that,
as the indigenous community,
they had the 'natural' right to rule Fiji,*

and therefore regarded other ethnic groups as 'guests'.⁴ This perception overrides other issues that are common to all ethnic groups. As one indigenous Fijian man referring to the Labour-led Coalition government of Prime Minister Chaudhary wrote :

This government has done a lot of good things. It brought down the price of several basic food items, also the housing rates and the cost of water



and electricity. But these things do not matter to me as a Fijian when land comes into the picture.⁵

This view was reinforced by the notion of paramountcy of indigenous Fijian interests in the 1970 Constitution, which ensured protection of important indigenous Fijian rights. The military coups of 1987 had a dramatic impact on inter and intra communal relations in Fiji. It deepened the divisions between the ethnic groups and even within the indigenous Fijian community and the Churches.

Factors Underlying Coup 2000

At the level of formal politics, ethnicity has always been a central, organisational and mobilisational factor. It has been deployed as the basis of the state structure, Constitution and electoral system. The state has become a site for ethno-nationalist debate. Institutionally entrenched ethnic organisation helped to reproduce a pattern of political and social behaviour which ‘normalised’ ethnic differences. Two contradictory tendencies need highlighting here; firstly, the attempt to keep ethnic groups apart through communalism at the political level; and secondly, the use of the ‘multi-racial’ rhetoric as a way of justifying such an ethnically divisive strategy. This dichotomy has consistently been a major cause of tension, which has been demonstrated in the coups of 1987 and 2000.

Communalism vs. Multiracialism

In the first few hours of the May 19th 2000 coup, the coup leader, at his first press conference appealed for communal solidarity through his use of the “cause” and “indigenous rights” language. As a result crowds of supporters (men, women and children) flocked in from almost all the provinces, but predominantly from the more economically marginalised provinces of Tailevu and Naitasiri. Many, however, did not seem to know who was the ‘enemy’ or what the ‘cause’ was all about. As one supporter later admitted :

For once there was a real sense of unity among us [indigenous Fijian people] when I heard George Speight’s call. But now I don’t know who is the real enemy and who is using who and I wonder whether the cause is to hide something else.⁶

One of the basic contradictions relating to ethnic politics in Fiji is, on one hand, the desire to maintain communalism and consolidate separate and antagonistic identities, and on the other hand, the need for a unifying national identity under a democratic system of national governance. It was assumed that, encouraging separate identities was tantamount to respect for diversity that was healthy for national unity. The rhetoric popularised by the Alliance government in the 1970s and 1980s to refer to this arrangement was 'multi-racialism'. Wolfgramme⁷ argued that multiculturalism, as a political strategy for national unity will never work in a communal setting.⁸

The multi-racial policy had its own contradictions and shortcomings, which were seen in the military coups of 1987, when the predominantly indigenous Fijian military overthrew the newly elected multi-racial government. Multi-racialism worked only in as far as it served communal ends. Any political force, which threatened the indigenous Fijian chiefly establishment and political identity, was not tolerated, whether it was multi-racial or elected through democratic means. In this respect, democracy was seen as workable only if it served communal purposes. The 1987 military coup brought an end to multi-racialism as the dominant idiom of political discourse. Ratuva argues that the major flaw of the multiculturalism experiment was its failure to address basic social justice issues and issues of equity.

It was assumed that understanding cultural differences was vital for nation building. The 'multiculturalist' approach was cruelly exposed in 1987 when the two military coups took place. This was because multiculturalism only addressed the superficial aspects of culture at the symbolic level and ignored the fundamental issue of equity.⁹

Attempts to create a unifying political system have not been easy, due to the entrenched political culture of ethnic segregation. As early as the 1980s, the then Prime Minister, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, mooted the idea of a government of National Unity. However, the main opposition party, the NFP, and other critics dismissed the proposal. They argued that it was a way of stifling political opposition. This was the last major attempt at national integration until the review of the highly controversial 1990 Constitution.

There was a big shift in political perception at the time of the review of the 1990



Constitution. The 1990 Constitution was promulgated through military decrees to legitimise the post-coup regime. It provided for indigenous Fijian political dominance as the recipe for political stability. However, local and international opposition to the 1990 Constitution led to its review.

The Constitution review process was the closest Fiji ever got to the stage of national reconciliation.

The result was the 1997 Constitution, which in a way, because it was based on wide public consultation, was perhaps one of the most democratic constitutions in the world.¹⁰ But it must be noted how diverse, if not irreconcilable the many submissions to the Review Commission were.

Ironically, however, Rabuka, the 1987 Fijian coup maker, and Jai Ram Reddy, the leader of the Indo-Fijian dominated NFP, who brokered the deal to move Fiji towards national reconciliation and political unity were displaced from the political centre stage at the first general election under the 1997 Constitution. A consequence of this was that the momentum for national integration engineered by Rabuka and Reddy was derailed and the political gravity swung back towards a more ethnically confrontational politics.

Since the last general election in May 1999, the emerging political configuration has been characterised by more tension and potential destabilisation. The conflict over land, and in particular, the expiration of leases under the Agricultural Land Tenancy Act (ALTA), has intensified and has fed into political tension. The Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) and many landowners are adamant that the land leases, most of which are held by Indo-Fijian cane farmers, will not be extended.

The answer to the ethnic tension lies in creating an area of convergence somewhere in the centre. This will take considerable political will and moral commitment on all sides of the political equation. Because the state has become the site for ethnic conflict and has been shackled to the politics of ethnicity for historical reasons, civil society remains the most important force to bring about national reconciliation and consolidating a national identity. In this respect, the Churches and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play a very influential role.

The Struggle for Political Power among Fijians

After the first two weeks of the May 19th 2000 coup, it was clear to many people that the coup was not only about race, it was also about the political power struggle within the indigenous Fijian community.

To understand the political power struggle within the indigenous Fijian community, one needs to understand the nature of indigenous Fijian politics. The official history of Fiji recognises the Eastern chiefs, in particular one prominent chiefly family (the Cakobau family), as the ones who ceded this country to Britain in 1874, and in doing so promoted the political dominance of the Eastern chiefs over the rest. However, some influential individuals and chiefs from the East and the West resisted the move to subjugate them under colonial rule. Consequently, they were politically exiled and uprisings were squashed. These incidences of political power struggles were not documented in the official history of Fiji but have much to do with the continual political marginalization and economic disadvantage of some rich resource based provinces.

Since independence in 1970, the Eastern chiefs, especially from provinces in *Viti Levu* and *Lau* have held political power and indirectly reaped most of the economic benefits that should by right benefit all indigenous Fijian people. The May 19th coup then, was also seen as redressing the imbalance of political power and economic benefit distributions among the chiefs of the eastern and western regions. As Dakuvula notes,

Before the coups [of 1987], the traditional status of a small group of chiefs' position (such as Ratu Mara, Prime Minister, and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau, President) had already been strengthened by their political leadership in the modern state system. However, many chiefs who are members of the Bose Levu Vakaturaga [Great Council of Chiefs] are relatively poor and have not necessarily gained from or had their interests and positions secured by the new constitution, despite the prominent role the constitution has given to this body in the parliamentary and executive system of power.¹¹

Unfortunately, due to this country's ethnic political development and entrenched ethnic beliefs, the race card was used to 'gloss over' the political power struggle



within the indigenous Fijian community. Teaiwa argues :

The race card is misleading and mischievous, and unfortunately, Mahendra Chaudhary, Fiji's first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister played right into it with his abrasive leadership style. But in the end, Chaudhary is not the problem and neither are the Indo-Fijian communities. Fiji's problem is Fijian...the impoverishment and disaffection of indigenous Fijians is not a result of 12 months of leadership by an Indo-Fijian. It is a result of 30 fraught years of modern indigenous Fijian leadership in which the cultural and economic well being of a people have been sacrificed for the advancement of a few.¹²

Thus,

*the race issue was used as a convenient political strategy
for the ruling indigenous elite,*

including the chiefs and the new elite from the tenure of Rabuka's government, to strengthen the system that protected and enhanced their position of power and wealth, amidst the rising levels of poverty, lack of constructive development, participation and ignorance among their people. Durutalo wrote in the late 1980's that,

In the Fiji case, we can see that despite the emergence of classes, those at the upper reaches of the society are using their ethnic identities both to secure their class benefits and to obscure the basis of them from their fellow ethnics...Ethnicity in this context becomes a mask for class privilege.¹³

At another level, the indigenous power struggle is really a site for deeper tensions, rooted in identity conflict and reproduced throughout the colonial and post-colonial history. Formal ethnic political differentiation is usually based on assumed socio-cultural and ethnic differences. Ethnic identity has been a vehicle in which these differences have been invoked and mobilised. This became more pronounced after the 1987 military coups where the over-politicisation of Fijian identity became a means of ethno-nationalist mobilisation and ethnic exclusiveness.¹⁴

Ethnic Politics and Disparity of Wealth

One of the popular perceptions among indigenous Fijians is that the Indo-Fijians are wealthier than they are. This gives rise to the belief that since the indigenous Fijian people are the resource owners, it follows that they should receive more of the financial benefits. Issues of equity and fair distribution of wealth are of no consequence in this view. One of the major problems the ousted Labour-led Coalition government had with the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB) during its one-year rule was in dealing with this perception. This was played out in the uncompromising stance of the two on issues of land rentals and land lease renewals.

This perception of ethnic disparity in socio-economic distribution is one of the causes for ethnic tension.¹⁵ Distinction has to be made here between 'real' and 'perceived' inequality. The former refers to empirically substantiated economic disparities while the latter is based on generalised assumptions about a group as a whole. In Fiji, perception by indigenous Fijians of Indo-Fijian wealth has been a cause for communal tension. However,

*inter-ethnic disparity may hide intra-ethnic
social-economic inequality*

Within the Indo-Fijian community itself, there are vast differences between the various socio-economic classes, such as the Gujarat business class and the rural sugar-cane peasants or urban workers. But these class differences are usually overshadowed by emphasis on ethnic differences.

While some forms of economic inequalities were 'hidden', some, like business-ownership, were more visible. This was readily used as a basis for ethnic scapegoating and ethno-nationalist mobilisation, and was one of the motivating factors behind nationalist mobilisation at the time of the 1987 coups and the May 2000 coup.

One of the first tasks of the post-coup government of 1987 was to put into place affirmative action measures to address ethnic inequality. Amongst the institutions, which were used to carry out the pro-Fijian preferential policies, were the Fiji



Development Bank and the National Bank of Fiji. Due to the lack of proper control and accountability, these became slush funds for a few privileged indigenous Fijians. In fact, affirmative action has merely widened the class disparity within the Indigenous Fijian community. Ratuva went on to add that studies show that affirmative action policies in Fiji have done very little to bridge the economic gap between indigenous and Indo-Fijians:

Evidence show that the real beneficiaries of affirmative action policies have been the new indigenous Fijian elite and prominent chiefs.¹⁶

Similarly, after the 2000 coup, the interim Prime Minister's first task was to draw-up a blueprint that would address indigenous Fijian concerns. While the blueprint was an attempt to address these grievances, it unfortunately painted a narrow view of self-determination, and what it means to the ordinary indigenous Fijian person, let alone to the other ethnic groups. Genuine self-determination takes into account the interests of other groups and other persons. The other major flaw of the blueprint is that it is based on an economic model of efficiency and output. The presumption is that by allocating financial resources for their development, indigenous Fijians would be able to compete with other ethnic groups. Moreover, the blueprint seemed to exclude essential developmental issues such as political maturity, ethnic poverty, system of wealth distribution, accountability and transparency, education and multiculturalism. It also does not encourage entrepreneurship among indigenous people, and there seems to be no mechanism to monitor and ensure that the allocations reach the rural and poor indigenous Fijian communities.

Two points need to be stressed here. First, economic disparity does play a significant role in aggravating ethnic tension. When economic disparity coincides with ethnicity, there is bound to be increased tension and potential violence. Second, that the pre- and post-independence policy of 'separate development' in effect deepens social and economic inequalities between and within the indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities¹⁷

Economic Interests

During their tenure in power, the Rabuka government favoured Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), privatisation, and other forms of economic right-

wing policies as the desired catalysts for economic growth and wealth distribution for the country. During this period, Fiji saw the privatisation of the Telecom Fiji, Airports Fiji Limited, and Fiji Ship Building Limited that resulted in significant job losses.¹⁸ At the same time, this period saw the emergence of a privileged class among the indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian communities. This trend was also emerging in other parts of the Pacific as Hau'ofa noted in the mid-1980's.

One very important development that we have to watch carefully is the emergence of privileged classes in the Islands for it is certain that the fates of the Island communities are being decided by the ways in which these groups act, first, in relation to their own underprivileged people and, second, in relation to their important connections with each other and with similar groups elsewhere... The privileged have high aspirations because they can generally get what they want through their ability to plug into the wider economy and by strictly regulating the access to the same resources by others. The underprivileged are poor because of their inability to tap the regional resources and are therefore left to make the best out of what is available in their immediate physical surroundings... It is the privileged who decided the needs of their communities and the directions of development and whose rising aspirations and affluence entail the worsening conditions of the poor.¹⁹

The Rabuka government was seen, (at last) from the perspective of the workers and many ordinary members of the public as being against their interests and concerns. The economy remained relatively static and erratic with no real signs of growth. The government reduced the costs of doing business, reviewed labour laws, proposed to abolish the wage guideline and to peg wages according to productivity, and to reduce company taxes.²⁰

When the Labour-led Coalition government came to power in May 1999, they had a 'people centred' approach to development. They brought hope to many people. In late 1999, the Labour-led Coalition announced its 2000 national budget. There were huge allocations made to the social service sector; notably education, social welfare, poverty alleviation, healthcare and micro-enterprise initiatives for those who wanted to start their own businesses. It also proposed and implemented the removal of Valued Added Tax (VAT) on some basic food items, reduced housing



rates, electricity and water rates. These were huge gains for many ordinary people and for the low-income earners and the poor in particular.

However, there were mixed reactions from the private sector.' On the one hand the small local businesses were generally pleased with the policy framework for improving their business performances, based on the incentives and concessions made in the 2000 national budget. On the other hand, big local and international corporations were generally not pleased. The Labour-led Coalition proposed to review the tax system to allow for the introduction of capital gains tax and increased company tax, to review certain companies' monopolies on the power and communication sectors, and to introduce a national wage based on both productivity and cost of living adjustment (COLA). These major budgetary policies underpinned its 2000 national budget. However, they became controversial and highly debated at the national level soon after the government announced its 2000 budget. These budgetary policies were indicative of the vast differences of views on how the economy should be run or be regulated. In general, the private sector favoured free trade market policies, while the then government favoured some regulation on issues of 'free trade' and 'open market'.²¹ The review of the rice quota for import/export was an example of the threat to the private sector. It set the trend on the Labour-led Coalition government's future economic policies and work relationships with the private sector. In other words, one could expect a lot more government participation in economic and trade matters unlike under the previous SVT government.

But whatever the merits of government's intention or the benefits of its reversal policy, the exercise became racially controversial which added to the already growing suspicion among the indigenous Fijians of government's sincerity on its election promises to act on their concerns. The Media organisations, Fiji TV One and the Fiji Times Limited in particular played a crucial role in fuelling suspicion between the government and the indigenous people. The reversal of some of the privatisation deals meant that those who had lost their jobs had the possibility of regaining them. However, this became a racial issue at the level of the unions where there were claims that the reinstatement process was racially biased and did not follow proper procedures.

The Labour-led Coalition government also set up a Commission of Inquiry to look into the tendering processes for the privatisation deals and to investigate corrupt practices within the civil service, as well as tax evasion by prominent indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian business persons, and the tendering process for the Mahogany and Y2K deals where it was alleged that thousands of dollars changed hands between the big companies and prominent indigenous Fijian individuals. The Commission was also responsible for putting together a code of ethics for the Judiciary and the office of the President. Their inclusion in the proposed code of ethics met strong reactions from the indigenous Fijian people and members of the legal fraternity and the Judiciary.

The policy of reversing previous decisions and the setting up of a Commission of Inquiry rang alarm bells in the private sector circles and among the indigenous people as some prominent indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians business persons were reportedly linked with and who were presumed to be involved in the inappropriate conduct of the tendering processes. While commentators debated the feasibility of these policies, politically, they became racially explosive issues. Moreover, because of the common belief among indigenous Fijians that high Chiefs cannot be put under the scrutiny of the public, it was considered highly inappropriate for the Labour-led Coalition government to include the office of the President in the proposed code of ethics. Over the ensuing months, these issues became very racially controversial.

The Confusing Role of Christianity in ethnic policies

The role of Christianity has been much criticised since May 19th. The confusion was very evident (as it was in the 1987 coups) when George Speight and his close supporters claimed that the coup was the 'will of God' and that one of their main priorities when they formed a new government would be to declare Fiji a 'Christian state'. This contradiction was further compounded by the fact that some church ministers frequented the Parliament complex during the crisis who have not been decisive and persistent on their stand on crucial justice issues.

The week following May 19th, the mainline Churches issued statements that condemned the coup and called for reconciliation and calm among their members. The Churches have been active in providing counselling and material assistance to



many families and their church members. In assessing the situation the mainline churches felt that addressing immediate issues such as anger, fear, insecurity and emotional and psychological problems through individual and group counselling, was the priority at the time. This work will no doubt carry on for some time.

*But the Churches have not been persistent
in following through on their statements*

There were politically motivated reasons for the lack of persistence. Sensitivity to the current context would be one of the reasons. To align themselves with the persistent call for justice, respect for human dignity and human rights, and the values of democracy, is to lend themselves to misinterpretations of their motives and the possibility of them being seen as against the 'cause'. The consequences would inevitably be divisions within the ranks of the clergy and members depending on their political stance. Moreover the leadership might risk finding themselves isolated from their ordinary members even though they were supposed to provide prophetic leadership.

To understand the difficult political position of the Churches, it is worthwhile to briefly examine the role of Christianity in the development of ethnic politics. The interplay between Christianity, in particular Methodism, and politics has played a major role in shaping nationalism in Fiji, especially because Christianity in general has been intricately linked to communalism. This ambiguity has in fact characterised the role of Christianity, especially Methodism, within the indigenous Fijian community. On one hand, there was its deployment as a means of legitimising communalism and nationalism and on the other, there was its ethnic reconciliatory role. This contrast was based on different theological interpretations of politics. The more conservative faction supported communalism and nationalism, and the more liberal faction was inclined towards ethnic reconciliation and multi-racialism.

It was really during the military coup of 1987 that this 'division' began to manifest itself more explicitly. The fundamentalist Methodist faction had always been one of the most important allies of the chiefly system and communalism. The faction preached that chiefs were divinely ordained to rule ("divine rights of chiefs") and the



commoner's place at the bottom of the pile was God's will. Indo-Fijians were regarded as worshippers of idols and false gods. Since Christianity was introduced into Fiji in 1853, it has become an inseparable component of the indigenous Fijian ethos at all levels. One of the reasons for this was that, to ensure acceptance of it by the entire community, the missionaries first of all converted chiefs, who then declared *Lotu Vakarisito* (Christianity) the *lotu* (religion) of the *vauua* (people/land). Conversion was not an individual affair but a collective one, which involved the chief and *vauua* as a communal entity. The absorption of Christianity into the ideological and cultural realm of the *vauua*, became a permanent feature of the indigenous Fijian communal system.

One of the ways in which the redefined notion of the paramountcy of Fijian interests was projected was in the form of religious domination and persecution (such as Sunday roadblocks and the firebombing of Hindu temples in 1987). This was so because the ethnic and religious boundaries coincided; indigenous Fijians were mostly Christians and Indo-Fijians were mostly Hindus (and the other minority religious groups were Muslims and Sikhs). The fundamentalist Methodists, who were closely aligned to the military regime, wanted Fiji declared a Christian state. In response to this demand, the military regime imposed a Sunday Decree in 1987, but this was lifted a few years later after public outcry and its negative effect on the economy.

Within the fundamentalist paradigm, chiefs (*turaga*) were regarded as representatives of the Lord (also translated as *turaga*). The association between the earthly *turaga* (chief) and heavenly *turaga* (God) served the purpose of reinforcing the unquestioned divinity of chiefs as cultural icons, and the political authority of the *vauua*. Thus any act which militated against the *vauua* or indigenous Fijian culture was interpreted as being against God's will. Non-Christians were not only 'heathens' but also 'divine' enemies of the Christian God and of the indigenous Fijians. Sunday roadblocks after the 1987 coups were staged by Methodists to express their anger over trading and road transportation by what they referred to as 'heathen races'. In June 1987, the Army published its propaganda in the Fijian newspaper under the headings 'The Call to War is Sounded. Fight On! Fight On! In the Spirit of God!' The article urged Fijians to protect their chiefs and church by saying:



Are we Fijians prepared to be ruled by an unchiefly and unchristian system? The Army is trying to protect the chiefs and their people....We are relying on God to be Lord of this land. We should not worship other gods. Nor should we worship wealth, moon and sun, or the intellectuals. Only Jehovah should be Fiji's God....If leaders of the land are non-Christian, the Fijian race will be wiped out.²²

The role of Christianity has been crucial in providing ideological legitimacy to communal mythology.....

in particular fundamentalist Methodism. This was achieved by the assumption of chiefly hegemony and the paramountcy of Fijian interests as being of divine right. But contending forces within the church itself have ensured a significant degree of fluidity and contradictions in relation to the church's links to communalism.

Conclusion

Resolving ethnic conflicts is a difficult task. In Fiji's case, there are people who, on the one hand are convinced that democracy cannot work within a communal system and as such, democracy is identified with Indo-Fijians' quest for political power to further their economic interests. On the other hand, there are those who believe that liberal democracy is the only system of governance that will guarantee every one's human rights, irrespective of race or religion. Indigenous Fijians are accused of being 'backward' and their communal system of sharing and caring is considered to be a major drawback in their development. Such viewpoints are not helpful but perpetuate and give on-going legitimacy to race politics. However, there needs to be an appreciation that Fiji and its people is going through a period of rapid social change and that tensions, both ethnic and class, do exist and have to be acknowledged.

The indigenous Fijian people find themselves caught between the values of communal life and the more democratic system which upholds the individual's interest and

rights. This is an issue they need to grapple with for some time and in the process should be aware of the political minefields. They also need to acknowledge and critically examine the power plays that are going on within their community between the various provincial groupings, as well as between the chiefly class and the more educated and independent group of urban Fijians. While it is true that for many indigenous Fijians their concern for their communal system of support and sharing needs to be strengthened, they also need to acknowledge that, like all systems, it is not static, but evolves over time in view of the rapid socio-economic and political changes that are influencing their way of life. The challenge for them is in ensuring that all participate in the evolution of their communal system into one that is more equitable, accountable, just and sustainable for the average indigenous Fijian person. This in itself is a huge task that requires a moral commitment and courageous far-sighted leadership.

For the Indo-Fijians, ethnic politics is also part of their political development, and while they are more comfortable under democratic rule, they need to acknowledge the fact that liberal democracy cannot be an overnight solution to ethnic and class problems nor the panacea for all political problems. They also need to acknowledge the two different contexts, in which the languages of democracy and human rights are uttered and understood: that when Indo-Fijians speak of democracy and human rights, the indigenous Fijian person understands these to mean social responsibility in the context of social and economic rights. Liberal democracy is not the only possible system of governance and allowance must be made to accommodate cultural and traditional insights within governance. The crucial challenge in the country's desire for a 'new' system of governance is how to accommodate differences of political opinion within and in relation to each ethnic group.

The attempt to merge the SVT and NFP political parties by Rabuka and Reddy respectively, was a failure but it was a genuine attempt to rid Fiji of the shackles of ethnic politics. As one correspondent recently noted in his letter to the Editor in one of the local newspapers,

In a country with two dominant races, with roughly an equal distribution of population, one would have expected that by now each would be able to possess a fair ability to, not only to speak the other's language, but more



importantly to have a sensitive understanding of the other's genuine culture and tradition.²³

However, the failure of this initiative should not deter Fiji and its people from trying to forge ahead towards building an inclusive society.

For the Christian Churches the biggest challenge facing them is to de-legitimise their role in support of communalism and nationalism as ideologies. They need a two-way process that on one hand, creates a sense of 'community' imbued with the values of the Gospel, and on the other hand, evangelises Fiji society with the passion and integrity that is based on the prophetic tradition of the Bible. In effect, these processes should challenge the Churches to push the boundaries of what they mean by 'missionary church' in this modern age. This challenge, if bravely taken up by the churches, would impact on their understanding and practice of ecumenism and would also impel them to work more closely with the other religious faiths - Muslim and Hindu faith traditions.

Notes

¹ Durutalo, S., (1986): *The Paramountcy of Fijian Interest and the Politicization of Ethnicity*, Suva:USP Sociological Society.

² Durutalo, *The Paramountcy of Fijian Interest and the Politicization of Ethnicity*

³ Dakuvula, J., (1992:71): *Chiefs and Commoners: The Indigenous Dilemma in Tu Galala*, David Robbie (ed.), Australia: Pluto Press

⁴ Ravuvu, A., (1991:35): *The Façade of Democracy: Fijian Struggles for Political Control 1830-1987*. Suva: Reader Publishing House.

⁵ Daily Post 5/6/00

⁶ Daily Post 6/7/00

⁷ Daily Post 6/7/00

⁸ He went on to add that an alternative must be found which will not lead to the dead-ends which have called forth Rabuka and Speight.

⁹ Ratuva, S., (2000:67): *Towards Multiculturalism and Affirmative Action: A Case for Fiji*, in Educating for Multiculturalism, Suva: Citizens' Constitutional Forum.

¹⁰ There is a presumption that because the 1997 Constitution was accepted by the Great Council of Chiefs, the rest of the indigenous Fijian people followed suit. The problem

was not the consultation process per se but rather the lack of full participation of ordinary indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians in the process.

11 Dakuvula, *Chiefs and Commoners: The Indigenous Dilemma in Tu Galala*, 71

12 Teaiwa, T., (2000:1): *Nationhood subverted by More than Race*, Sydney Morning Herald, 23/5/2000

13 Durutalo, *The Paramountcy of Fijian Interest and the Politicization of Ethnicity*, 6

14 Ratuva, *Towards Multiculturalism and Affirmative Action: A Case for Fiji*, 25

15 The economic disparity among Fijians had been the subject of two major investigations commissioned by the British colonial administration. The first was *The Fijian People : Economic Problems and Prospects*, by Professor Spate in 1959 and second was by Burns in 1960. Spate attributed the lack of Fijian economic progress to, the rigid communal system under the native policy. Burns concurred with Spate's findings and emphasised the fact that communal ownership of land undermined Fijian economic progress. Both these reports were rejected by the Indigenous Fijian Administration but were only implemented in part.

16 Ratuva, *Towards Multiculturalism and Affirmative Action: A Case for Fiji*, 25

17 Cameron, J.; (2000:134): *Confronting social policy challenges in Fiji*, in Confronting Fiji Futures, Akram-Lodhi (ed.) Australia: Asia Pacific Press, Australia National University.

18 Sepehri, A., and Akram-Lodhi, A.H., (2000:84,88): *Fiji's economy: the challenge of the future*, in Confronting Fiji Futures, Akram-Lodhi (ed.) Australia: Asia Pacific Press, Australia National University.

19 Hau'ofa, E., (1987:10-11): *The New South Pacific Society: Integration and Independence in Class and Culture in the South Pacific* ed. a. Hopper

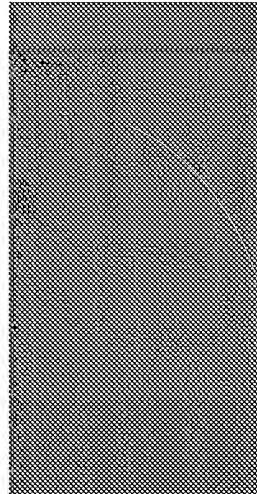
20 Chand, G., (2000:168-169): *Labour Market Deregulation in Fiji*, in Confronting Fiji Futures, Akram-Lodhi (ed.), Australia: Asia Pacific Press, Australia National University.

21 These policies were discussed in a collection of articles published in Confronting Fiji Futures (ed.) A. Haroon Akram-Lodhi (ANU, Canberra:Asia Pacific Press, 2000)

22 Nai Lalakai

23 Amputch, "National Challenges" *Fiji Times* 29/8/00





Fiji and the Third Sacrament

A plea for sacramental dialogue in a country of political dissonance

In a multi-cultural, multi-lingual society like Fiji, the need to find a cross-cultural and socially acceptable rite for political or social discussion is an onerous task. The religious rites tend to pertain and make sense only to the particular religion that performs it. Social rites on the other hand belongs to and is appreciated at the most by the society that upholds the rites. This article while airing the Fijian voice in the impasse is also positing a methodology for consensus and dialogue.

The title of the article is taken from the fact that there are only two sacraments, baptism and eucharist, in the Methodist Church in Fiji. It would be of no consequence to mention these facts apart from that the majority of the Fijian population belong to that denomination.

The Methodist Church in Fiji is also reputed to be the driving force in the formation of a new political party that was party to the downfall of the supporters of the government of the first coup leader. Thus the church by that role has become a force in the formation of the political will of the nation of Fiji. However, the political

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climates in Fiji is such that its militancy is also a source of embarrassment to church leaders. So much so that the Methodist Church in Fiji has been discussing this political issue more frequently in their Annual Conference than in the past. Even though Methodist Church minutes of the annual conference do not show the minutes of all discussions, however, reliable sources have confirmed the thoughts expressed above.

This paper is attempted from within that tradition of faith that accepts only two out of the seven sacraments in Peter Lombards "Sentences".¹ The call for the third sacrament is a call to expand the sacraments of the Methodist Church in the light of what may transpire later in the article. It is a call to keep an opening for God in the people's quest for a political solution.

The second reason for the title is from the decision by Martin Luther to recognise only three (3) out of the seven (7) sacraments of the Roman Church. And of the support given to the Lutheran ideas in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. To Martin Luther all the sacraments that are needed for salvation are :-Baptism, Eucharist, Penance/Reconciliation.²

The first two have been accepted by the Methodist Church in Fiji. The proposal for the Third is an attempt to convince the church, and the people for that matter, of the practicable way the Third Sacrament could be used in terms of explaining the past and a map a course of action for finding a solution to the present crisis.

Confessions a Sacrament

The sacrament of confession is known by the name Penance/Reconciliation in the theological circles. But the two titles are not the same yet are very much a part of each other. Penance point to the way the sacrament is tied to acts of being penitent. The misgiving is to its historical connotation in its use in the medieval Catholic Church. Yet confession continues to remain a social act in human society. Every society in their own special way have a confession /restitution rite of one way or another. The people use it daily in their apologies: 'I am sorry', or 'Forgive me please', is heard from the confines of family halls to the corridors of power. It is a sacrament that attempts to handle the past and make that past a contributor to the living present. Confessions accept not only the glory but more importantly the



blunders of the past. Here lies the contention with previous works in that there seems to be the search for the glory and leaving the pains at the underside of their work. It accepts that past actions can be factors to the present pains. It does not attempt to describe the past, it attempts to do something about it in terms of accepting the responsibilities of ones role in it.

Why a Sacrament?

Why insist on using a sacrament? The reasons are both accidental and intentional. The accidental part was born in an attempt to find a category that: (a) deals adequately with history as the problem in Fiji seems to be historically based; (b) is acceptable to a multi-religious and multi cultural society. Because of the multi religious nature of the Fiji society, the need to move away from the Christian oriented ritual to a more multi-religious rite would be an important requisite before any dialogue could occur. Thus an attempt to substitute penance with confession and a re-explanation of what is to be meant by the sacrament; (c) it evokes a sense of sacred reality in the people.

*The attempt here is to ask all political interlocutors
to question their role in terms of their
own sacred realities*

Political answers because it evolves from a personal and power centred institution tends to be over bearing and exploitative.

The intentional part was an attempt to deal with the history of the Fijian people. A history of marginalisation, cultural reductionism, exploitative policies and just plain negligence on the part of the people that wielded power. It is the author's view that unless the past is made somehow acceptable to the Fijians the political problem will always find a nest in their minds to hatch a turmoil or two.

Confessing history

There is a need for someone or something to be responsible for the problems faced by a nation. Political problems are normally entrenched in history and it seems that nothing can be done about them. But this type of reasoning is only the

reasoning of the weak, the vanquished and the poor. It is not a reason for accepting that nothing can be done about it but really it is the powerlessness to do something about it. When the Allied Forces won World War II, they immediately put the vanquished on trial and demanded payment for the expenses of war. Further to that, they even dictated the domestic and foreign policies of the defeated nations. The Imperial Japanese army has only been re-armed to a degree worthy of that nation recently. Saddam Hussein is still reeling from the punishment slapped upon him by the victors of the Gulf War for invading Kuwait almost nine years ago. In other words, the powerful, the mighty, the strong can make others pay for historical blunders while the weak must only try to live with it.

Confession of history is non-confrontational. This is a process in dialogue and acceptance of history. It demands the acceptance of the errors of the past and the honest attempt by the others to listen to them. It also points to those that perpetrated or are still perpetrating the problem that they are responsible. Silence must not be construed as acceptance but that the people are too weak to force the issue for the time being. When the strength returns so shall the courage to correct the anomalies of the past. It is an attempt at harmonious living and to make acceptable the historical factors. It is admitting that there was a mistake of some sort. The present situation, in which the past becomes a frequent visitor, will breakdown against the weight, the pain, and anguish that the past brings. Unless that past is taken care of, the breakdown will continually appear as a militant negative force of the turmoil to the present.

It is also accepting the responsibility of imperial states in the life of the colonised nations. Colonial powers need to accept their part in making the nations as they are. In accepting that, the pain bottled up through the years can be aired and perhaps healing may occur. Acceptance brings healing and healing may one day beget wholeness. In a nation of divided loyalties and interest, the opportunity for healing and wholeness is an important and perhaps a critical one. The antithesis of that is much revenge, chaos and ultimately death. The coup of May 19th 2000 has shown that it is possible to reap death as a result of historical pains; so if you have eyes then see, if you have ears then hear.



History in eyes of a Fijian

A different view of what the historical data means from what is presented in the paper is widely available. In particular, the foreign and the dominant view is available in books if one cares to look around. The view presented here is, as the title says, from the eyes of a Fijian. It is looking the facts if you may from where the Fijian feet are standing.

A History of Exploitation

The history of Fiji is a history of the continuing exploitation of the indigenous people. These exploitative stands will be examined under two headings. First, the economic exploitation of the country. The cause here is the shifting of what I call development centres away from the indigenous people. Development centres are where decisions on funds, education, rural development and other government machineries are located. In places where Fijian villages lie within the bounds of these centres, the people are relocated to live in reservations.³ Not only are they shifted away from the centres, the process also alienate them from the land of their ancestors. In being absent from the land the new ruler places new names on the land eradicating the memories their nation that was stored in the old names.

These development and relocation would force the poor Fijian peasant to pay considerable money in order to seek and secure their services from these centres. Even food would be an expansive commodity. To buy fish, Fijians in the interior pay \$20.00 for transport to buy a \$10 bundle of fish. The friends that live near the centres pay about 40c each way to the fish market. No trader would make the \$60 trip to the interior of the country to sell \$10 worth of fish. Life is made more and more expensive for the already poorer part of the community whose contribution to national taxes in than 20% of total.⁴ Yet less than half the total population wield 80% of the economic muscle.

Along with the shift of development centres is the shift in development direction. The arrival of the indentured labours made the shift possible. The natives were trading in bech-de-mer and sandalwood long before the decision to plant sugar-cane to sweeten English tea. The indigenous population refused to move to development centres to develop the sugar industry. The powers of the day labelled them lazy and not willing to work. But planting sugar did not make sense. Sugar was not something that the native population thought very much of, perhaps because

of the availability of alternatives. Sugar cane was not something that was used quite often in their daily lives. Even when used it was associated with children and a type of 'remember your food' to the women. Sugar cane is not a Thing for food, it served no useful purpose. The Indian labourer, assured the colonialist of a workable chance at the shift in direction. While the Indians might berate the difficulties they faced with the British raj, he was fast becoming a matter of concern to the indigenous population. To cater for the huge arrivals of indentured labourers, some 60,000 immigrants⁵ (Lal 1986:viii) as against the country's population of ninety thousand (90,000); it was inevitable that land would soon become an important concern. For the new comers land was the very ground that their coming was built on: for the natives the most sacred of all possessions will be alienated to cater for the new development and the new people. It only stands to reason then the native Fijian objection to Indian presence dating back to 1888.⁶

An Indian political leader has this to say in 1946:

"We Indians came to save the Fijian race from the infamy of coming under As a matter of fact, if anything, the coming of my people to this country gave the Fijians their honor, their prestige, nay indeed their very soul".⁷

As AD Patel has pointed out above, the Fijians at the bottom of the economic ladder should consider themselves fortunate that they had a big brother, (in the indentured labourer) and to consider their position as honorable and a prestigious office to occupy. That view is not a one off view, it is typical one held amongst the Indian people. That they are the saviour of the nation is often sang in public and in private conversations. The indigenous Fijian are the ones being saved. Saved from what? From second class citizens to what are they now? From economic obscurity to being obscure in the economy.

The balancing act cited by Norton⁸ that "The Fijians' land, {83% of total area about 20% the value of alienated land}⁹ The political statues of their chiefs, and their dominance in the army, are balanced by the Indians achievement in commercial farming, business, the professions and the Civil Service".¹⁰ (Lal 1986: 55).



This type of learned mathematics continues to confirm the alienation process in the nation. How on earth he could pronounce a balanced human equation is fuzzy at the most.

The second part of the exploitative forces is the exploitation done to native land. This piece of real estate, as some have termed it, is a cause for misunderstanding, fear and at worse times hatred. It has been a source of controversy and historians have used their learned rhetoric to attack the Fijian's refusal to give up land even if it means reverting to bush.

The problem is the way the Fijian view the land. It is easy to demand land from a community seeing that there is so much of it. The idea of land holding often is a thorn between the landowner and those needing the land. Land is a sacramental entity. To the Fijian to die is to go to another land. To be known, you are known by the land that uphold you. The people are often called the land¹¹ (David 1994:58 quoting Ilaitia S. Tuwere).

"Thus the concept of vanua is an encompassing one; it is the totality of a Fijian Community. Used in various contexts, it can refer alternatively to the social and physical environment, or to the supernatural world, or to all the elements which make like occur"¹²

The land is sacred, it has the power to effect its sacredness of the people. While this may be baffling to people immersed in a culture or ownership and property and they "may be tempted arrogantly to dismiss this statements as wistful, nostalgic, idealistic, romantic even as a desperate hankering after the restoration of the Garden of Eden, many others would regard them as "inspired and inspirational".¹³

To the Fijian to survive with dignity was to survive with his land the resting place of his fathers. The land is the keeper of their story. Various names of the land speak of wars, of treaties, of how a family became chief, of expulsion, of death and of many other things. In like manner Chief Sealth observes, "every hillside, every valley, every plains and grove has been hallowed by some sad or happy event in days long vanished".¹⁴

In the meantime, sacred rites, sacred memories are erased by the onslaught of exploitation and profit-making entities. In their process of exploiting the land they economically used all the resources available, politics, media, economic interest and a type of religious interpretation to crush and subdue what the indigenous people's protest at the injustice they are experiencing. This is a struggle the indigenous people of Fiji are not taking alone. The Pacific peoples are trying to get their land back that was alienated by exploitative and unfair practices. The Aborigines of Australia are doing it, the Maoris of New Zealand are doing it. The Haida Nation of Canada, in Guetamala, in Sarawak in the United States of America, Colombia, Bolivia and the Kalinga people of Phillipines are exploiting it.¹⁵

"For the indigenous tribal people, the land of their birth, their ancestors, their history and their heritage is part of their personal and community identity, a part of themselves.....They neither "possess" nor live on the land, but consider themselves inseparable part of the land, enjoying the God-created beauty, the essential goodness of their unique part of the universe.. Their sacred stories identify them with the holy places and events which occurred in the land the creator has given them. To be deprived by violence, or oppression of a peoples ancestral land is to be deprived of identity, freedom, self-determination and the fullness of life.....Yet this is the broken status of millions of human beings of indigenous tribal peoples around the world and other peoples dispossessed of their lands"¹⁶

For the indigenous Fijian, this land is sacramental, for out of its dust, they were formed [Gen. 2:7]. And to its dust they shall return. To allow the market concept of land acquiring would ultimately alienate the owners of land. Once the land is alienated, the peoples have lost the repository of their history and the custodian of a part of their identity. Is it not obvious then there is the strong indigenous Fijians objection to continuing land giving? One can only give so much and beyond that, he gives himself into nothingness. The Fijians concept of the land is not sacrosanct but in understanding, it may make their position amicable and not so much a subject of criticism and ridicule.



Talking about the present

The present can be discussed under three factors : (a) cultural reductionism; (b) education; (c) language and information.

The paper will be interpreting the data in a way to express the reality from a definite Fijian perspective.

Cultural reductionism

The fact that the Fijians are viewed as jungle fowls by the Indian population is well known by the Fijian people.¹⁷ (Croccombe ed 1981:178). It is not a very endearing way of naming a person. Reddy even states in marrying natives is marrying down the social scale¹⁸ (Croccombe 1981:39). The Fijian is viewed as being below the acceptable social line. In these state of things the Fijians belong to the underside of society, a substrata a normal human society. This social difference become quite marked at times. In World War II when 2201Fijian soldiers (42 lost their lives) saw active service oblivious to the fact that the Europeans were being paid more than they were¹⁹ (Davies 2000:7). The Indians however refused to support the war effort in the argument that they wanted equal pay with the Europeans.²⁰ (Lal 1986:59). The fact that the Fijians were in the battle front did not matter for the Indian community to exert their social right was more important than upholding democracy and paying it with one's life. Seventy years down the line the Indian community are going to be basing their political life on the principles of democracy that their fathers refused to defend. Davies in his article reported racist advertising in the national daily.²¹ (Davies 2000:4) the definite demand for Indian only and the exclusion of indigenous applications do provide proof of their opinion of the indigenous population. The fact that media hostility to Fijian causes exacerbates it. Davies draws a distinct example in citing the racist advertising of the Fiji Times of November 2, 1996; "Prasads houses flats wanted for Indian families only, near city, urgently need."²² (Davies 2000:4) The national TV channel has an Indian program where the theme song is 'I love my India'

What food do we find in the restaurants, what music, what language is needed for trade? All these continue the marginalisation process and the reducing of the Fijians to forever live in the underside of society and of life.

Education

The deepest and perhaps the unkindest cut of all is the labeling of Fijian children as under-achievers and the worst of times, idiots. The Fijians have been labelled as under achievers, lazy and refusing to work. The education achievements have been understated through deft manipulation of figures. What is remarkable is the fact that the nation does not have an Indian boarding school. And the idea that the Indian education system has built closely by so that the boarding is discouraged shows their centrality to development centres. To the Fijians, on the other hand, the cost of education is enormous. There are schools that have to allow boarding for six year old students even in the year 2001. This is vicious upbringing as the child is barely ready for a change of environment let alone a completely new world altogether. At times the environment is unaccommodating and foreign; and now the child has to face these without the support of the parents. Isn't it a wonder that the child does not survive? The accusation that the solution here is rather simplistic is possible. When one considers the proposal put to government by the Fiji Islands Education Commission/ Panel that what is needed to improve Fijian education " is a more co-ordinated, holistic and multi-pronged, integrated approach..."²³. One can feel the academic rhetoric that is becoming a method of describing Fijian education. A reading of the report one could not help but notice the condescending attitude and as Puamau so rightly observes

"when the term Fijian education is used it is in relation to some education deficit, as if there is something inherently wrong with Fijian students and Fijian schools.."²⁴

The comment that the "emphasis has always been placed on the negative aspects which have obscured the positive achievements of Fijian"²⁵ a welcome note. Yet the lumping together of rural and urban schools in their data shows insensitivity to the profound influence the environment plays in the educational process. Returning to the little child once more he/she just may grow up hating the system that took the security of the mother away from him or her. The school environment is a hostile environment to the young child, who may learn to hate the system to the end of his or her days. No study has been made on it but since the coup of 1987, and the concerted effort to educate the Fijian people, the result has been quite remarkable as the report does record that the number of Fijians who hold degrees is impressive²⁶.



The number of lawyers, doctors and other graduates are there to be acknowledged. To continually harp about it is perhaps for other agendas than the love of the education of the Fijian people.

Language and Information

The comment by Davies would be a good starting point

“Fijian academics....so desperate to be accepted as real intellectuals by their Indians and expatriate peers (who often determine their contract renewals or promotion prospects) that they throw themselves into anti-coup, anti-Fijian, anti-tradition, and pro-liberal western rhetoric with all the enthusiasm of the converted”²⁷

Here the very elite of Fijian academic minds are expected to tow the academic line for promotion purposes. The logic continues to say that to defend or believe in the Fijian cause is to incur a static future and perhaps non-promotion to professorship.

The Fijian tradition is non-matter at the highest level of Fijian academic. It goes on to say that the Fijian language would not fare any better. There is a definite need to promote the language. Not the language as perceived by the people in power. But the language that is taught to promote their thoughts and views about things. Here I refer to the rites of language like the chants, the dance and the poetry of the Fijian people. These authentic expressions are dead –

*these forms of supreme language that express
the very soul of the people are no more*

There is no more economic interest in their survival thus they die a quiet death.

In language, the word of Kim Yong Bock echoes the same sentiment when he says

“We must go back to one of the primary, not primitive, terms of people communication, that is, the telling of their own stories by the people themselves. In telling their story, the people act as their own spokesperson

rather than having somebody speak for them. To tell the story is to be the master of their own language and creator of their own meaning. They tell their own dreams and visions”²⁸

It is this voice that is no longer in the Fijian language, killed by the rejection of the Fijian language as a useful tool in development.

The discussion is almost a protest one without any reference to the sacramentality in it. The observation is perhaps not wrong. With the meaning of what things mean and the sacramental nature of it, perhaps the magnitude of the task becomes clear. With that articulation comes understanding of what the past means to the people we make demands on. Hopefully in our understanding, we shall find the words to communicate of our confession to one another.

“If sacrament in the broad sense is... a human reality which realises and manifests an intervention of God in our world for human salvation, and if this intervention is taking place largely in the struggles of the people for life, land, community, etc....how is this to be recognised and reflected in the mission of the church?”²⁹

Indeed the reflection is in the sacrament of confession. In a sense the argument is a first part before one comes to restitution. But restitution is not a part of the domain of the confessor. The confession is to accept history deal with it sacramentally and move towards the present in the sense of the past having being partly taken cared for.

Sacrament should bring dialogue not confrontation

It should bring assonance not dissonance. It brings two sides to the starting point of the present with past no longer making demands on either of them. Really it places both their feet on even grounds before they even begin to plan out their future.



Conclusion

The third sacrament stands as an alternative voice to politics or segregation, intimidation and racial prejudice. It offers a starting point of acceptance of one another and that the past need not keep playing such a pivotal role in their lives. It challenges the way the Fijians and Indians view each other. Because they stand to find a common future together, they will need to find a way to working that out together. The tone of the paper may lead people to believe that the confessional act is impossible; that their differences are very wide and that the gaps may not close. Yet because their very future is threatened and the future may be very bleak that the need to make an effort is necessary. That the people are polarized, and politically distant is common knowledge. What shall be done about it is the concern. And really I believe that without the third sacrament the alternative is chaos, disintegration and pain on both sides of the human equation.

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Notes

- ¹ Macquarrie 1999:445
- ² David, K.A., (1994:19);*Sacrament and Struggle. Signs and Instruments of Grace from the Down-trodden*. Geneva:WCC Publications.
- ³ The reference is to the people of Nauluvatu now relocated to Suvavou (in the outskirts of Suva) to make way for the expansion of the greater Suva area. The excuse given to

the people was that the land was needed by Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna, a Fijian high chief, for the grazing of his cattle. (information from Maika Navunidakua Ratu, the tribal leader of the displaced clan).

4 Davies, J., (2000:3); *On the Source of Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Fiji*. And on whether the Reeves Report and the 1997 Constitution offer a workable solution. A paper submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee that reviewed the Reeves Report., Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

5 Lal 1986:viii

6 Ravuvu, A., (1991:); The Façade of Democracy. Fijian Struggles for political control 1830-1987. Suva: Reader Publishing House, 1991

7 Lal 1986:52

8 Lal 1986:55

9 Davies, J., (2000:10); *On the Source of Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Fiji*. and on whether the Reeves Report and the 1997 Constitution offer a workable solution. A paper submitted to the Joint Parliamentary Committee that reviewed the Reeves Report. Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

10 Lal 1986:55

11 David 1994:58

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13 David, K.A., (1994:59); *Sacrament and Struggle*. Signs and Instruments of Grace from the Down-trodden. Geneva:WCC Publications.

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17 Crocombe, R., (ed.); (1981:178); *Pacific Indians, Profiles in 20 Countries*, Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies

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20 Lal 1986, 59

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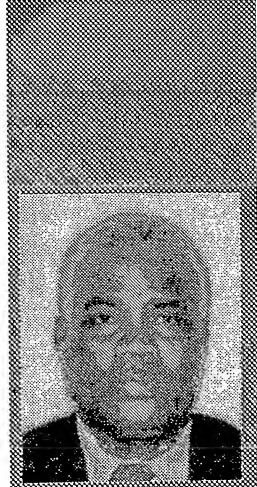
26 Bachus, *Learning Together*

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28 Davies, 1994:86



Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Land and Identity



Rev. Dr. I. S. Tuwere

The twin concerns of land and identity are the primary questions of the present crisis facing Fiji.

Land in the Fijian context is not merely saleable commodity. As we shall see, it is a heavily loaded term and combines together economics, politics, history, sociology, ethnicity, tradition, identity and spirituality.¹

Introduction

The eruption that followed a peaceful protest march on that Friday, 19 May, 2000, while I see it as sad, shameful, deplorable and unacceptable, should be taken as inextricably part of our constitutional development as a multi-cultural community, a people trying to grapple with the whole idea of what is called democracy and the democratic process. And it has not been easy. The present Fiji situation is riddled with so many complex questions, issues and problems and we should proceed with our response to the political crisis with caution.

The coups both in 1987 and 2000 should be taken as belonging to the crucible of our political development as an independent state beginning from 1970 up until today.

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As a people, a nation, we did not from the beginning (1970) experience what it means to be an independent nation. It was all new and foreign and we did not fight for it like other countries. On the side of indigenous Fijians or *itaukei* it was all done with trust and respect through their chiefs. On the side of others, political independence was not a new thing; they saw this as a political necessity and have had experience of it in their motherland. India for example had to fight for its independence from the British through Ghandi and others. I think we in Fiji are going through that crucible now in an accentuated form because of similar events happening in other parts of the world, and we are beginning to pay for it.

It is imperative and responsible to place the current crisis in historical perspective. The crisis is not entirely a stand alone event, it is part and parcel of a historical process. Much of what transpired in 1987 are still there, forces that led to the overthrow of an elected government. These forces can be summed up under one conclusion and that is the *itaukei* (indigenous Fijians) want to rule in their own land. The words of a senior Fijian civil servant in a submission in 1987 still stands:

“The basic question must be addressed and answered. The question is, should Fiji be more Fijian or should it become more Indian. Put another way the question can be, should Fiji promote a Fijian image or an Indian image”?²

This desire to have sovereignty of their land in their hands can be traced back to 1874 before Fiji was finally ceded to the British Crown on the 10th of October of the same year. They reluctantly yielded their sovereignty to Britain in the first place. There already was the immigrant white settlers community and backing this community, commissioners from Britain intervened on the false assumption that Fijians could not control these rampant Anglo-Saxons who were increasing in number. And then in 1879 the British government introduced plantation labour and brought in the Indians under the indenture system. Over the years, relations between the two major races on the surface have always been amicable, in everyday contact in the streets, the shops, the offices, sugars mills, factories and cane-fields. They remain so today.



But it is also important to know that private reservations and dislike of each other do exist. There has been little really intimate contact between Fijians and Indians. Intermarriage is very little though slowly changing in recent years. Not all Indian parliamentarians could speak Fijian. Even in multiracial schools there is not necessarily much intimate understanding or appreciation of each other's culture. Cross cultural friendship can be strong but communal attachments are usually stronger.

It would be impossible to capture all the things that should be said about the crisis in Fiji in the time frame that we have. I personally want to do some more writing on this in the next few months not for any other reason but for the future role of the church in Fiji. In an age where science and technology have thoroughly influenced society and its different institutions, it would be disastrous to neglect our history. And here I am not only talking about written history, I am also referring to oral history or stories and narratives about one's past. Not only objective history as we understand it but myths and legends as well. For the past is the repository of one's memory and therefore identity. An individual or a collective group who has lost his/her memory does not know where he is going or who he is.

For this reason schools and tertiary institutions through encouragement or even state legislation must make it a core subject in their curricula. I am referring particularly for our purpose to the history of land acquisition, alienation and ownership in Fiji. In a place

*where land has always been part and parcel of the identity
of the indigenous people, its history should be
given a prominent place in institutions of learning*

The younger generation should be granted their rightful ownership of this memory of the land; its history and tradition. Ordinary people in the village often grumble and speculate on matters related to the land but they have hardly been officially told about the alienation of their land to foreigners and government in the course of history. A good example of this is the case along the coast near Dreketi in Macuata where the chief Ritova sold a block to a foreigner totaling over 100,000 acres when it contained over 50 villages.³ People of these villages have to be told to move

elsewhere in the province and they have been there ever since. They continue to retain their *icavuti* or name of identity to the land that is now no longer theirs. Similar instances can be cited in other parts of Fiji.

A Fijian does not think of himself as belonging within certain frontiers but as originating from the place where the founder-ancestor landed and after which the land was named. As indicated above, the term for this is *icavuti*. Its rendering in English is misleading. *Icavuti* implies 'belong to', 'being owned'. It follows that one does not own the land; the land owns himself. Man and land are one. He derives his name or identity and therefore his basic constitution as a human being from the *Vanua* which means both turf and community. The term 'title' reverses this. Land belongs to man. He has its title and therefore 'the right' to use it in any way he wants. Herein lies the basic difference between the Fijian view of the land and that of the Europeans.

What is important is to reclaim the past for the future

We must not try to shut our eyes from events of the past, a good number of them may certainly be unpalatable in the present but they are important. We must have the courage to face the facts and realities of our history and allow them to become releasing points for better things to come. So there must be a place for HOPE in the present crisis. But we must remember that **memory** is the mother of hope.

Using the words of Matthew Arnold for the moment, one can say that Fiji is poised "to wander between two worlds, one dead the other unable to be born".

In the aftermath of both coups (1987 & 2000), one would ask, what is that world that is now dead? Is it:

the world about which we used to proudly sing: "Fiji the way the world should be"?

The Pope told us this when he visited us in the 1980's.

or

the 1997 Constitution and the type of democratic set up it seeks to see done in Fiji?

or

the abrupt coming to an end of the political life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara who



can be rightly called the founder of modern Fiji? He was not only President but also the last surviving patriarchal paramount chief of Fiji with an illustrious international standing.

Or

the happy co-existence of the different ethnic groups especially the two major races? And the list of speculations could go on.

And there is time for everything under the sun says the sage:
a time to be born and a time to die
a time to plant and a time to uproot
a time to kill and a time to heal
a time to tear down and a time to build (Ecclesiastes: 3).

History has taught us precisely this in the last twenty years or so in our political development as a nation, that there is time for everything under the sun. In the midst of strife and war, sadness and shame, there is still the glow of Hope. And Paul Tillich's words on this make good sense:

“History is the totality of remembered events
which are determined by free human activity
and useful to the lives of human beings”.⁴

Specific Issues for Future Consideration

I mention the following issues only in passing and I want to return to them later for more probing.

1. The Fiji crisis is a Fijian problem

*The political crisis in Fiji is in essence the battle
for power among Fijians themselves.*

And Teresia Teiawa of Victoria University, Wellington is right when she says that “the problem with Fijian nationalism is that there is no Fijian nation”. What this means is the absence of a unifying force that was always there some years back under the leadership of the last surviving paramount chiefs of Fiji, beginning from

the colonial days up to the dawn of the third millennium. What one now sees is the gradual erosion of indigenous Fijian social order and the fragmentation of indigenous Fijian leadership.

Some serious works needs to be done to sort out this problem. And this includes a radical restructuring of Fijian institutions from the Great Council of Chiefs down to the village level. And the Fijian people themselves have to sort this out as quickly as possible. They must not allow other people from outside to do it for them. But they must carry this out themselves.

But in a multicultural society the Fijian problem also becomes a national problem. For the problem here is not merely political. It has to do with what it means to be a human being. It has to do with the question of BEING not simply DOING. Not merely political but ontological; relatedness in being.

The case of the indigenous dimension of humanity comes to the fore here. Is there a place for indigenousness in the modern world of technology, globalisation and the market economy? Can such space be intentionally created in the rat race of development and progress today? I believe there is and a space ought to be made available for the articulation and self-expression of this 'primitive' dimension of humankind. This must be done not for any other reason but for what this fast forgotten part of our common humanity can contribute to the rest of this modern world.

What one sees now is a world where primitivity is some people's sophistication and sophistication is some people's primitivity. Sophistication and primitivity, two related dimensions of our common life need each other for the survival of a deeply troubled world.

The word that best describe the human condition today is fragmentation. Fragmentation in many forms, not only in Fiji and the Solomons but in many parts of the world today. The inability, accidental and deliberate on the part of some not to listen to the other by allowing the other to be listened to and in turn leave his/her impression on the life of the listener.



2. The place of the *Vanua* (Land) in the Crisis.

“Laws effectively distils and volatilises all that is actually and potentially flammable in the nation state of Fiji”.⁵

For this reason it must be handled with great care. This does not necessarily mean that we must steer well away from it. This also is equally dangerous. We must face it and address searching questions related to it from all angles: socio-economic, political, traditional and spiritual.

George Speight talked so much about the *vanua*. Little is known about this concept outside Fiji apart from indicating it as *land*. But it means more than that. Professor A. Ravuvu says that,

“the vanua contains the actuality of one’s past and the potentiality of one’s future. It is an extension of the concept of the self. To most Fijians, the idea of parting with one’s vanua or land is tantamount to parting with one’s life”.⁶

But it also means people – *Leve ni Vanua*. And when George Speight used this the way he did in an already explosive situation, he was really calling for the shots.

Different players and stakeholders had their own agenda, economic and political interests in the current crisis

It goes to show that People of the Land - *Leve ni Vanua* - were used by some to achieve their own ends. They remain unaddressed and unaccounted for. And because of this, the common people of Fiji continue to cry out looking for leadership and political trustees who can articulate their groaning and help name their identity in a new and complex world.

The ousted PM Mahendra Chaudhry was an astute politician. He has always been a hardworking man in the trade union movement. His speech to the Great Council

of Chiefs was reasonable, and convincing at least to some of us who were present but some chiefs had already made up their minds as to who should be ruling Fiji.

It wouldn't be too much to say that ordinary people of the land were looking forward having to be led for the first time by an Indian PM. They welcomed him in the best traditional way wherever he went. But the man was not careful. He committed a number of political sins from the very beginning of his all too brief political ascendancy. One of them was the appointment of his own son to become his private secretary. This appointment, though may well be legally legitimate did not help him at all in a situation that was already poised to erupt at any given moment. It fired so many perceptions that were already circulating about him and his party. Mr. Chaudhry and his advisors were not sensitive and simply took little regard of the uprisings that were developing through protest marches and radio talk back during the few weeks before the eruption in May. And his abrasive leadership style may well be the last nail in the coffin of his political career.

The Labour Party was predominantly Indian, most of them sugar cane tenant farmers. Like any other political party during election time, promises have to be made to the electorate. And the burning question that tenant farmers were struggling with was the expiry of their leases. Expiry period is between 1997 and 2008 which will affect a grand total of 13,141 leases.

As part of the parcel of promise Chaudhry gave to these tenant farmers, government offered those whose leases were not renewed a government grant of \$28,000 each. This amount is virtually sufficient to purchase a freehold farm. Also it tragically exceeds the totality of rent paid out by the tenant to landowners since Fiji became a colony in 1874.⁷

Because of both the traditional and economic significance of the land in Fiji and the fact that it stands right at the centre of the present crisis, one could not agree more on the thought that this matter must be seriously addressed by both church and state and all their institutions must be engaged in a frank and honest discussion on this subject. A theology of the land must be articulated to enable the *Vanua* to participate fully and actively in the making of a history for Fiji and the birthing of a new tomorrow. I have tried to do this in a small way in my doctoral thesis.



Relation between Gospel and Culture.

The three strands that make up the Fijian cosmos are: *Vanua* (Land, *Lotu* (Christianity) and *Matanitu* (State). In the course of our history, these have become so inter-twined that the collapse of one is the collapse of the whole. This was clearly demonstrated in 1987. The *Vanua* and *Lotu* were involved in the coup and the subsequent formation of a new government.

On the 19 of May, 2000 it was slightly different. The *Vanua*, in disarray was involved. The Methodist Church, the largest religious body was not there. But there were Christians who were in the parliamentary complex everyday singing hymns, offering prayers and preaching sermons. The principal actors here were some leaders of the new fundamentalist religious groups in Fiji.

There are people actively involved in the political turmoil both in 1987 and 2000 who seriously believe that the cause for which they are fighting is Christian and from God. A number of things can be gleaned from this but as for this writer, it raises the important question about the relation of Gospel and Culture. This relation, important as it is to the Fiji situation is equally important to any place in the world today. There is nothing wrong in the culture itself when we relate this to the Christian faith. As Lesslie Newbigin says:

Neither at the beginning, nor at any subsequent time, is there or can there be a gospel that is not embodied in a culturally conditioned form of words. The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion. It is, in fact, an abandonment of the gospel, for the gospel is about the word made flesh. Every statement of the gospel in words is conditioned by the culture of which those words are a part, and every style of life that claims to embody the truth of the gospel is a culturally conditioned style of life.⁸

No one culture can claim to have it all. Or to exhaust the full dimension of the gospel. There are both the life-denying and life affirming aspects of each culture. The measuring rod to determine whether or not a given aspect of a culture is life-affirming is to bring this under the broad light of the Kingdom of God. The relations between Gospel and Culture is such a huge and important subject and touches practically every dimension of faith and life. Because of this, it must find a visible place in the training programmes of Churches.

A Culture of Exclusion

It would be interesting to hear what the rebels (not Speight and those behind him) have to say on the crisis; people from the interior of the mainlands – Vitilevu and Vanualevu. Women and children who have to travel long distances to bring food to the hostage takers.

It would also be important to hear the stories of people (mainly Indians) whose shops, homes were broken into, robbed and burnt.

These stories are stories from the under side of history at different levels of course. The converging point of these stories it seems to me is exclusion. The experience of being excluded from the mainstream of progress and development. On the part of the nationalists, they claim that the way the country is being governed make them strangers in their native land. And on the side of Indians, they say they have been robbed of their democratic right to live and participate in the development of a country they call home.

Both sides therefore share a common culture of exclusion.

How do we deal with this? For a broader dimension of this culture of exclusion, we must listen to the views of some of our own social scientists.

Socio-economic factors affecting the islands including Fiji and changing people's lifestyle consequently give rise to marginalisation or exclusion. Professor Epeli Hauofa of the University of the South Pacific advances the views that,

there already exists in the South Pacific a regional economy upon which has emerged



a South Pacific society, the privileged group of which share a single dominant culture with increasingly marginalised local sub-cultures shared by the poorer classes.⁹

He goes on to say that the ruling class of this dominant culture have increasingly become culturally homogenous, sharing a common language which is English, the language of trade, education, information and the judiciary system. Proponents of this dominant culture are the educated elite right across society and they share common interests with business and ideological partners in Australia and New Zealand.

The heavy imbalance in the trade link between the islands and Australia and New Zealand leave little or no choice for the islands but to be integrated into the Australia and New Zealand economy. In this way, Canberra and Wellington assume added power over the small island states in the South Pacific now and in the foreseeable future.

Professor Hauofa observes that this emerging ruling culture engenders a sub-culture that is shared by the underprivileged, who often are out of the mainstream of business activities that are largely concentrated in towns and urban areas of the main islands. In the case of Fiji, it would be interesting to see the implications of this in the spread of its population in urban and rural areas: who are the rural and who are the urban dwellers in Fiji today?

Because of this process of marginalisation, subsistence economy becomes the common lot of the marginalised.

*It is the privileged who can afford
to tell the poor to keep their traditions*

And they are usually reluctant to live the same experience themselves. Being excluded from the mainstream of something is a force on its own. It is helplessness. Belonging but does not really belong. Asking for bread but given a stone, for fish but given a snake (Matthew 7:9). This experience of exclusion which present socio-economic

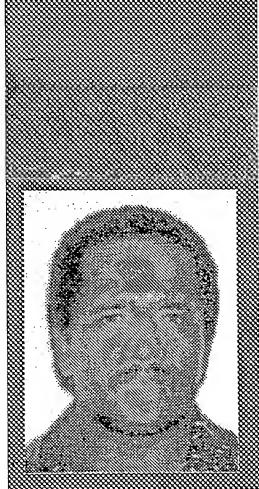
realities show will build up in future. And it must be taken up as a point of hermeneutics, of interpreting what it means to live as a Christian community in this part of the world. How can the church be a community **of** and **for** the excluded? What cultural forces in villages and communities that can be singled out as marginalising factors giving rise to the concentration of power to a few and subsequently pushing others to the periphery of the poor and the powerless? Theologians in Oceania today must entertain in this vicious circle a hermeneutic of 'suspicion'¹⁰ to enable them to responsibly address this culture of exclusion. For this reason, they must have the eyes to see and the ears to hear the marginalising trend of progress and development at work from the local to the national level. And the struggle should continue on at every possible point in the life and work of all Churches.

Notes

- ¹ see "Reforming the Leasing and the Use of Agricultural Land in Fiji: An economic Incentive Approach." By John Davies and Courtney L. Gallimore, June 2000.
- ² see Fiji: The Politics of Illusion by Deryck Scarr, NSWU Press 1988.
- ³ France, Peter in The Charter of the Land. Oxford University Press, 1969.
- ⁴ Reference for this quote cannot be located.
- ⁵ see "Reforming the Leasing and the Use of Agricultural Land in Fiji: An economic Incentive Approach." By John Davies and Courtney L. Gallimore, June 2000.
- ⁶ see Vaka i Taukei by A. Ravuvu. University of the South Pacific, Suva, 1984. p. 70.
- ⁷ Davies & Gallimore. op. cit.
- ⁸ see Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: the Gospel and Western Culture*, Geneva: WCC World Council of Churches, 1986.
- ⁹ Epeli Hau' ofa, "The New South Pacific Society: Integration and Independence" in *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*. Eds. Antony Hopper et al. Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Auckland and Institute for Pacific Studies, USP Suva, 1987.
- ¹⁰ The concept of 'suspicion' is borrowed from the Jesuit priest Juan Luis Segundo.



The Anatomy of the Crisis in Solomon Islands from a theological perspective



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Introduction

The subject of this essay is the so-called 'ethnic tension' on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands. In particular I will try to discuss the tension in relation to the Gospel and to culture. The reason for choosing to write on this topic is basically two-fold. The first is because of its currency. The crisis started around December 1998 and continues to this day. Moreover, as a current crisis it is, in my opinion important and necessary to reflect upon it theologically. The second reason for choosing the topic is because of its significance in terms of the destruction, suffering, the lives lost and the compounded cost it has inflicted upon the nation as a whole.

The approach taken in this essay is to look at the broader picture instead of narrowly focussing on the tension per se. By broader picture I mean taking into serious consideration the socio-political and cultural context of the Solomon Islands as the context for both situating and understanding the crisis. The same approach is also the one put forward by Tarcius Tara.¹ The reason for this is basically because while it is simplest and tempting to narrow down the discussion to the crisis itself, the

discussion will be like someone ‘floating in the air’, without historical and firm attachment to the ground.

This paper is divided into four parts. In part one I will state the crisis particularly its surface appearance as ‘ethnic’, its implications, and, a brief discussion of the Gospel within the Solomon Islands (cultural) context. Part two takes further the ‘ethnicity’ of the Solomon Islands and discusses the search for a national consciousness. In part three I will present a deeper discussion of the crisis. In particular I will highlight the several factors, which are believed to contribute to the crisis. In the final part I will look at the various attempts that have been made toward resolving the crisis. At the very end of the paper I will endeavor to put forward a conclusion.

Part One: Statement of the Crisis, Cultural Diversity, and Arrival of the Gospel.

“Nothing is ever what it appears to be.”²

The “ethnic tension” – so it is most widely known – on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands is between the two ethnic groups of Guadalcanal and Malaita. The tension erupted in December 1998 when certain elements of the Guadalcanal people (originally called the Guadalcanal Revolutionary Army, GRA) started chasing out Malaita settlers on Guadalcanal. The Malaitans retaliated and the tension escalated into ethnic physical and sometimes deadly confrontations. The GRA then becomes what is now known as the Isatabu Freedom Movement (IFM) which has been countered by the formation of the Malaita Eagles Force (MEF). These two ethnic frontline groups have been engaged in fights and shootouts that have resulted in numerous deaths on both sides including, unfortunately, some who are not members of either. The tension has lingering effects to both groups and serious impacts to the nation as a whole. Homes and property have been destroyed, people displaced and killed, major businesses either disrupted or forced to close, and the economy stagnating are just some of the impacts of the tension.

In the preceding paragraph I try to describe the crisis in the way that it has been told and known throughout the world. The crisis has been seen exclusively as tension



between Guadalcanal and Malaita people. Such perception of the crisis conveys the image of hatred and enmity between the two groups. Unfortunately this is the image and perception that is propagated and perpetuated by the public media, and even official government statements.³ While there is some element of truth in subscribing the crisis to ethnicity it is a very simplistic understanding and, therefore, not inclusive of the more pertinent factors that led to its eruption.

There is certainly substance in the claim by Tarcius Tara that “while ethnicity should not be completely disregarded, *there is also a need to situate the crisis within broader socio-economic and political developments...* Ethnicity is simply the arena through which the conflict manifests itself in an overt forms; it is the avenue through which frustrations are expressed,”⁴ (emphasis mine). The crisis is more than what it appears to be – it is more than what it has been made to appear.

The term ‘ethnic’ is already indicative of more than one. In the light of the crisis it is taken to mean more than one or a diversity of ethnic groups. A brief look into this diversity is in order. Alvaro de Mendana, a Spanish explorer lured by the hope of finding the isles of King Solomon’s gold,⁵ was the first European to ‘touch’ the islands to which he gave the name Solomons. This name stuck and Britain, in a move to expand its market and counter the French and Germans colonization race, declared the Solomon Islands a British Protectorate in 1893.⁶ The six major islands, amongst hundreds of other smaller ones, of this British colonial construction are Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita, and San Cristobal. Underlying this group of island nation are vast and significant diversities.

A few examples would suffice to demonstrate this diversity. The socio-political set-up of the islands was very much fragmented and fluid. People lived in small communities according to clan or tribal lines.⁷ Allegiance was also primarily tribal. Leadership of the tribes was in the hands of the *big-man*. Leadership position was not hereditary but was based on person’s ability to amass wealth, and then to distribute it to tribal members as a sign of generosity.⁸ Solomon Island societies had either a patrilineal or matrilineal kinship. This held true for all Melanesia in general.⁹ With reference to the Solomon Islands Guadalcanal was/is a matrilineal society while Malaita is a patrilineal one. The type of kinship has a lot of bearing on not only tracing of ancestors and relatives but on handing down of rights, especially land rights.

The approximately 450,000¹⁰ people in the Solomon Islands speak more than eighty-seven different languages.¹¹ Considering the centrality and significance of language to a people – their worldview, construction of reality and meaning making – this language diversity was in itself very significant. According to Darrell Whiteman different languages “represent different realities altogether.”¹² Amos N. Wilder writes along similar lines but goes further when he says, “the language of a people is its fate.”¹³ Not only language is a people’s fate, it was/is the tool for world-making, “the primitive does not see an object and then give it a name. Rather in naming it he calls it into being.”¹⁴ The important point in the case of the Solomon Islands here is that the diversity in languages meant more than just that. These examples of diversities can show why it is that ethnicity becomes the almost natural opening through which conflicts and crisis erupted.

The Gospel and its form

It is important to note that it was into such pre-Christian cultural diversity that the Gospel entered. But what exactly was this Gospel with which Christianity came? It is perhaps necessary and important to differentiate the Gospel in the form in which it is borne, from Christianity. The very heart of the Gospel must be the love of God (John 3:16). This love is God’s sacrificial love. The teaching of Jesus makes it undoubtedly clear that the most important of all commandments is to love God, neighbor and self. St Augustine (354 –430 AD) said that a virtuous life is a life of love. He saw the four forms of love as temperance, fortitude, justice, and prudence. He further said that “temperance is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God; fortitude is love bearing everything readily for the sake of God; justice is love serving God only, and therefore ruling well all else, as subject to man; prudence is love making aright distinction between what helps it toward God and what might hinder it.”¹⁵ Was this the Gospel that Christianity introduced into the Solomon Islands?

In consideration of the above question it is important to remember what Anton Wessels says, “Christianity came into being in Palestine, a province of the Graeco-Roman empire.”¹⁶ As such it was wrapped in the culture of its birth, growth and expansion. Wessels makes it clear that as Christianity expanded it came into contact with the dominant cultures throughout its history. In particular he traces the “interaction between Christian faith and Hellenistic, Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and



Germanic culture and religion,”¹⁷ and how inculcation of the Gospel, and Christianity as a whole took place without much notice and deliberation. This has a lot of implications for the practice of Christianity and even the Gospel that was introduced into the Solomon Islands. Wessels distinguishes two ways through which the Christianization of Europe took place. On the one hand there was a very hostile and negative attitude toward culture, and on the other was a more positive and accommodating attitude.¹⁸ In H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* these two basic ways of interaction between Gospel and culture are known as Christ against culture, and, Christ as the transformer of culture respectively.¹⁹ It needs also be remembered that Niebuhr discusses others ways of interaction between Gospel and culture.

It is not too far off the mark to say that Christianity in the Solomon Islands is quite reminiscent of the former mode of interaction. Culture and cultural practices were condemned as evil and therefore must be abandoned. This meant that people’s souls had to be saved from damnation. New forms of worship and new objects of worship were introduced in the place of pagan ones. John Garrett provides a noteworthy description of the encounter between Christianity, through the work of the Anglican mission, and culture.

The policy of unification and peace was expressed by the integration of many villages round new Christian shrines...New Christian rituals took on the power of the old to ward off evil spirits. The ghosts of the dead seemed robbed of their power to haunt by the adoption of a new complex of benign spirits – Christ, his apostles, the saints – celebrated through the round of the Church’s year. Crosses replaced charms round people’s necks; catechists, working in partnership with government headmen, took the place of the older predatory Big Men of the headhunting era.²⁰

It is clear from the above description that

*culture and traditional religion were
relegated to a secondary position to say the least*

However, the question could also be asked whether the shrines, rituals, the saints, crosses, and catechists were the Gospel or simply western cultural/contextual wrappings of the Gospel? The *translation model* of contextual theology (synonymous with Niebuhr's *Christ against culture*) discussed by Stephen B. Bevans says, "there is the kernel of the gospel, which is surrounded in a disposable, nonessential cultural husk."²¹ In the case of the Solomon Islands both the kernel of the Gospel and western cultural husks were offered to the people. This has made me ask the following questions: Could the crisis on Guadalcanal be a reflection, in part, of the forms the Gospel was encapsulated in? Could it have been different had the Gospel assumed local cultural forms that would have encouraged and enhanced its assimilation in the lives of the people?

To be fair there were certain missionaries who were more positive in their relationship to local people and their culture. One such missionary was John Coleridge Patteson who worked with the Anglican Melanesian Mission. In 1861 he was consecrated Bishop of Melanesia. This positive regard Patteson had for the local people is shown in a letter written to his father in 1866, "...we don't aim at making Melanesians Englishmen but Christians; & we try to think out the meaning and attitude of the Melanesian mind & character – not to suppress but to educate it."²² The actual realization of such good and noble intentions is not clear.

Part Two: Search for a "National Consciousness"

"Solomon Islands or the Solomon Islands Community has never been a nation and will never be a nation and will never become one." (Solomon Mamaloni)²³

Since independence, 7 July 1978, efforts have been made toward creating some kind of national consciousness. Experience shows that this has not been easy. Even on the eve of independence the western Solomons, after years of dissatisfaction with central government, pushed to breakaway from the rest of the country.²³ The words by a former Prime Minister, the late Solomon Mamaloni, quoted at the start of this part show the difficulty with forging a national consciousness.



Despite the difficulties it is argued by some that there is a new sense of national consciousness, especially so amongst the younger generation in the urban context. Christian Jourdan, an anthropologist, is one such person who argues along this line. She identifies three 'stepping-stones' toward this new consciousness – the education system, Pidgin as a common language, and popular culture.²⁴ I would add here the system of government, at least in theory. One thing is clear from these 'stepping-stones' – they are all western oriented. What we are talking about here is the influence and institution of the dominant culture, namely western culture. What does all of this have to do with Christianity and the Gospel?

Churches, apart from the government, take active part in the provision of education in the Solomon Islands especially at the primary and secondary schools level. Church schools teach the same curriculum as all other schools – curriculum that is highly non-preparatory in as far as students' future is concerned. Furthermore, a curriculum that creates a strong sense of entering employment 'out there' thus severing their attachment to their roots. Moffat Wasuka in writing about education in the Solomon Islands says, "...modern education has come to be seen by many people ...as an activity separate from actual living. Traditional education on the other hand, is closely woven into the fabric of normal life."²⁵

Or take the system of government and the model of development under which all institutions, including the churches, operate. The system of government that distances people from decision-making processes in resource utilization, and a development model that diminishes benefits they eventually receive. The case of land, its use, development and the benefits received from it is a good example. Traditionally people received direct benefits from land. It was much more than just mere economic resource, "it was used to sustain life, land was also the basis of a way of life, socially and politically, and was not to be abused or exploited."²⁶ It would appear that the churches are in a comfortable position with such model of development. At least there has been no major outcry against the injustices inherent in such a model of development. In fact

*one of the frustrations of some Guadalcanal people
is the church's silence in their struggle.²⁷*

They see the church as on the side of the state. How is the Gospel relevant in such a situation?

Part Three: Socio-Economic and Political Context of the Crisis in Focus

“Social problems and issues, although they appear to be isolated pieces, are actually linked together in a larger system.”²⁸

I have stated earlier that ethnicity cannot be completely ruled out as a factor in the crisis on Guadalcanal. However, I have also said that there is much more to the crisis than just ethnic differences. This is the line of argument that is taken by Tarcius Tara.²⁹ I will outline briefly some of the more pertinent factors that contribute to the eruption of the crisis. It is important to note that these factors are interrelated.

The first of these factors is the system of government, its accompanying development practice and their failure to deliver. The Solomon Islands has a provincial government system. Frustration with the government system was felt even prior to independence. A clear demonstration of this was the move by the western Solomons (province) to break away from the rest of the country. Coupled with this was discontent with the disproportionate amount of government income that was paid to the province, the biggest source of national government revenue.³⁰ The biggest contributor to national income received only a small portion while one of the least contributors received the fattest share. In other words there was no justice in the distribution of government revenue.

Concerns were also raised that the provincial system of government was inefficient, inappropriate and expensive to run. Moreover, the people who were resource owners were sidelined in the decision-making processes, and received minimal benefits from development of resources.³¹ Dissatisfaction with the present system of government has led many to propose a federal (state) system of government. This was the goal of the western Solomons breakaway movement just prior to independence.³² The assumption here is that such a government system would devolve more power closer to resource owners thereby ensuring an equitable share of development benefits. It would appear now that most provinces favor the



federal/state system of government.³³ In fact there was already a recommendation for such government system by the 1987 Constitutional Review Committee but successive governments never implemented the resolution.³⁴

The second factor is internal migration of people. Sam Alasia, a former parliamentarian and Minister, claims that Malaita people's migration to Guadalcanal started in the 1500s.³⁵ Internal migration picked up after the Second World War, which also coincided with the development of Honiara as the new capital of the Solomon Islands. Alasia notes that the largest number of internal migrants was from Malaita when he says, not only are Malaitans to be found in all parts of the country but substantial 'Malaita villages' have sprung up in many parts of Guadalcanal, the Western Province and in the central islands. There are about eight 'squatter' settlements, mostly peopled by Malaitans, around Honiara...The population of the settlements amounts to about 15 percent of Honiara's total population of 30,000.³⁶

The implications and dangers of such people movement, and especially migrant settlements and squatters, were recognized and discussed even in the 1970s. However, successive governments and relevant authorities took no action. Hon. Paul Tovua, a well-known Guadalcanal politician and leader, called on Parliament in 1980 "to control the migration of people from one province to another. He was concerned about the unchecked flow of migrants to his constituency because certain of the migrants did not show respect for their hosts or their hosts' culture."³⁷ Tarcius Tara also raised this same sentiment.³⁸ Such reservation about Malaita migrants was however, not limited to Guadalcanal. The Western Province (Solomons) even prior to the WWII did not welcome Malaitans who settled and got married in the province.³⁹ Part of the reason for such negativity was the widely held stereotypical image of Malaitans as excessively aggressive, violent and industrious. This resentment also expressed itself in the breakaway move. How does the Gospel of love apply in such situations?

The third main factor is natural resource development and distribution of benefits. This is very much related to the first. The issue of land is central in any mention of natural resources. The value of land to the Guadalcanal people is obvious from the following motto of the IFM, "Land is our mother, land is our life, land is our

future.”⁴⁰ In an effort to acquire a more equitable share of income from investments on Guadalcanal, including rent for land on which Honiara is situated and the return of all alienated land, the Guadalcanal Province had demanded a review of the Lands and Titles Act. Experience has shown that the financial benefits resource owners receive have been minimal. A case in point is the jointly owned oil palm plantation on the plains of Guadalcanal – the Solomon Islands Plantations Limited, SIPL. The Commonwealth Development Corporation, CDC, owns 68 percent shares, Solomon Islands Government, SIG, 30 percent and Guadalcanal landowners a mere 2 percent. When in 1997 the Ulufa’alu government wanted to sell 20 percent of its 30 percent shares to the CDC, the Guadalcanal Province demanded that the government sells the shares to the province instead.⁴¹ The government gave no positive response. Landowning groups on Guadalcanal have persistently demanded just increases to the benefits due them but no positive response was forthcoming. Instead more land for expansion was acquired. It is no wonder then that Andrew Te’e, one of the IFM leaders sounds the following sentiment,

...there is a trend occurring worldwide where many indigenous and original owners of land have been forced to shift away from ‘living’ life to just simply ‘surviving’ it. This shift occurs when the original owners of land are marginalized in the name of ‘development’ for the benefit of the nation-state. This shift is caused by government policies and legislation as well as the actions of huge corporate industries that do not respect the land and those who originally belong to it.⁴²

The three major factors that I discussed above are related to other smaller factors, which I will not touch on here. However, it is necessary and important to stress again at this point that because of growing frustrations and disappointments with successive governments unsatisfactory response to demands by Guadalcanal people, ethnicity seemed the most natural channel through which the frustrations erupted into crisis. Unfortunately because of its inherent and representative nature, ethnicity suddenly becomes, or more precisely made out to be, the cause of the crisis.

A Theological Perspective on justice

Some reflection needs to be done at this point. Several points are made implicit in this issue that could perhaps be informed by the Gospel. The first is on the question of justice or more precisely economic justice for the use and development of



natural resources. The second is on the question of ownership of land and other natural resources. The third is the empowerment of people (original landowners) through their active participation in making decisions about the development and use of resources that they own. No doubt these three are interrelated and cannot be treated in isolation of each other.

What is justice, really? What is or could be regarded as a just return to the Guadalcanal land/resource owners for the use and development of these? What is or could be taken as a just compensation to the Malaitans, and others, for the loss of their property on Guadalcanal land? These are difficult questions to which there are no easy and straightforward answers. I shall attempt to briefly reflect on them.

Looked at from a cultural perspective justice could perhaps be understood within the concepts and practice of the barter system (of exchange), reciprocity, and perhaps quite ironically, the payback system. A barter system, and to some extent reciprocity, was a system of economics. In the barter system goods were exchanged for goods – a string of fish for a basket of potatoes for instance – and this was accepted as just. Reciprocity works along similar lines. A reciprocate act is one that is taken as the best in response to an earlier or initial act – best in the sense of being a just response. The payback system is a characteristic of the morals and ethics of traditional societies. It is a system likened to the Old Testament ‘eye for an eye’ (Leviticus 24: 17-20). Regardless of what we may say today, to payback a killing by killing another was acceptable in traditional moral values. It was considered just to take one life because one was taken earlier. In the Chimbu province in Papua New Guinea a life could be taken even as a means of restoring relationships between communities.⁴³ Now with the Gospel we say it is wrong to payback life for life, that taking one life because of another is not just.

But going beyond this cultural understanding of justice what else could be said? Justice could be looked at from a philosophical perspective. John Stuart Mill for instance sees justice as utility. Ultimately for Mill whatever is for the common good or good of the many is just, “...justice is not *sui generis* but is dependent on social utility for its foundation. Hence, all rules of justice, including equality, can bow to the demands of utility...”⁴⁴

John Rawls on the other hand sees justice as ‘fairness’. That is, a situation of fairness is a necessary precondition to make a rational choice (of what is just). In other words, “... principles of justice are derived not by assessing the utility of actions (or of tendencies of actions) but by rational choice in a fair setting.”⁴⁵ Those principles are geared toward basic structures of society to promote the distribution of basic liberties and well being. For Rawls justice is also distributive. In this view of justice the liberty and well being of individuals or the minority are not ‘traded’ for those others.

Robert Nozick offers another different view of justice that begins with a “minimal state based on minimal set of fundamental rights,”⁴⁶ such as rights to freedom of choice and action, rights against injury by others, and rights to own private property. The minimal state only has legitimacy in protecting these minimal rights and for their compensation but has no role in ‘distributive justice’. The least advantaged are not protected in this view of justice.

Justice could also be viewed theologically. The pastoral letter of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States in November 1985 provides a good starting point. The point of departure is the dignity of human beings as ‘created in the image of God’ – God who is both loving and just. More specifically the Bishops draw on the Catholic tradition of “commutative, social, and distributive justice.”⁴⁷ Commutative in the sense that an agreement or exchange is fair, social in the sense that attainment of the common good becomes a societal project, and distributive in the sense that societal well being is protected. The yardstick for measuring wellbeing are the poor

There is also a Protestant alternative view of justice offered by Reinhold Niebuhr. Unlike the Catholic Bishops who begin with the dignity of humans, Niebuhr begins with emphasis on sin. According to Niebuhr sin has not only tainted reason but also affected the institutions and structures devised by humans. Structures are a symbol of power and, therefore, “justice must be characterized first by a balance of power...[to ensure that the poor]...have enough power to meet their own needs.”⁴⁸ For him justice is more than doing ‘the greatest good’, or that the poor and disadvantaged are better off, or living wages are better etc. These are all relative justice because “all structures and arrangements of justice are temporary and



partial.”⁴⁹ Only love is perfect justice.

Liberation theology presents a challenge to views on justice. Jose Porfirio Miranda could be taken as a proponent of the liberationist view. The starting point is not justice but injustice hence a denunciation of the (capitalistic) structures that cause it (injustice). The liberation approach to justice is also grounded in faith. Here love and justice are not separated. For Miranda, “Justice begins in rejection of injustice. God is a God of justice above all; God is known only in the doing of justice; the doing of justice means doing justice for the poor... It is nothing short of liberation of the poor from all forms of oppression. There can be no divisions of economic and political spheres, for justice is all-encompassing”⁵⁰

The point in outlining all these different philosophical and theological perspectives on justice is simply this; the way justice could be understood and defined in the context of the crisis depends very much on what we make out justice to be. Whatever we make out justice to mean may fall within one or more of the perspectives or theories discussed above. Let me make a couple of examples. If we take the utilitarian understanding of justice, Guadalcanal people are at the losing end because the state sees them as a minority while it, the state, represents the common good. The Catholic commutative, social, and distributive justice may mean negotiating for a fair exchange agreement and fair wage (including fair return for resource development), participation in the process of development and production of goods and services for the ‘greatest good’, and receiving equal share in the distribution of goods and services. This becomes a very good model when it also addresses the root causes of social ills, as does the liberation approach.

The Land question

To the issue of land ownership. Traditionally land was significant in several ways – economically, religiously, politically etc. Land belonged to the people of a line, tribe or clan, and membership in such societal organizations gave them the right to settle on and use the land. Members of other different tribes or clans were not entitled to settle on or use land of one tribe or clan “except through special arrangements such as compensation, marriage, warfare, or gifts.”⁵¹ This was the same in Papua New Guinea.⁵²

One perennial question must be addressed – was/is land owned or was/is it given in trust by another to take care of, use, share, and pass on? There are two perspectives to this; the first is ‘yes’, land is owned hence land rights. This perspective comes out in Zoleveke, “Land rights are extremely important in a predominantly agricultural community.”⁵³ The point of land ownership is also made by Tarcius Tara⁵⁴ and John Ipo.⁵⁵ The second sees land as more of a ‘gift’ or more precisely heritage. This aspect also comes out in Zoleveke, “In effect land was an ancestral trust committed to the living for the benefit of themselves and generations yet unborn. Land was thus the most valuable heritage of the whole community and could not be lightly parted with.”⁵⁶ Similar views of land are also present in aboriginal populations in Australia and the Americas.⁵⁷

The second perspective mentioned above is similar to the Biblical understanding or tradition of land. This is the thread that runs through Walter Brueggemann’s *The Land*.⁵⁸ We could perhaps say that God the Creator gave or rather gifted land to human beings to manage. Human beings – here for a short while and are gone – are therefore stewards of land and should see ourselves as such. Generations come and go but land remains. We share in the promises as well as problems of the ‘promise land’ and then we pass on – we never really get a secure grasp of the land. In retrospect we could ask where are the Canaanites, Hivites, Jebusites, Hittites etc who occupied the ‘promise land’? We too will be gone and perhaps in time after we are gone, that which we call our tribe or clan will also be gone but land will remain. Another tribe, clan, or race will share in the promises and problems of that land. In a sense

we can never really own land but instead land owns

us for, in the end, to it we shall return.

The question now is how practicable are these views of land to the crisis on Guadalcanal? To answer this question in any length is beyond the scope of this essay. Following the former cultural perspective will mean that Malaitans, or any others apart from the ‘indigenous Guadalcanalians’, are not entitled to land on Guadalcanal unless it is through some special and acceptable arrangements. Following



the latter cultural perspective which is similar to the Biblical tradition will mean that Guadalcanalians are stewards of the land on which they live in as much as others are also stewards of the land on which they live. On this understanding the best approach to proper stewardship of land needs to be articulated and practiced. All in all parties involved – the government, churches and community leaders – must engage in open, honest, genuine, realistic, serious but loving dialogue with one another.

Part Four: The Search for Crisis Resolution.

“Blessed are the peacemakers...” (*Jesus*, Matthew 5: 9, NIV)

“...God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” (*Paul*, 2 Corinthians 5: 18-19, NIV).

“Reconciliation is an intensely sought but elusive goal.” (R. Schreifer)⁵⁹

In this final section I will try to present a brief chronology of attempts to resolve the crisis and then go on to make brief reflections on a couple of important issues namely compensation and reconciliation.

Since the beginning of 1999 there have been several attempts to resolve the crisis.⁶⁰ These attempts involved various groups both locally and internationally. The first major attempt was the *kastom* (custom) feast that was held on 23 May 1999. The feast was to have brought together the *Big Men* from Guadalcanal and Malaita to reconcile their differences. There was also exchange of gifts as forms of compensation. The gifts were both cultural (traditional/*kastom* shell money) and modern (several thousands of dollars). Unfortunately however, some very influential *Big Men* as well as some involved in perpetuating violence did not attend. The peace feast was initiated by the government and supported by the churches.

Following the peace feast were three peace meetings. The Commonwealth Secretariat and the government of Australia sponsored these meetings. The first of these meetings resulted in the Honiara Peace Accord, which was brokered by Major

General Sitiveni Rabuka and signed on 28 June 1999. The Accord acknowledges that the failure of successive Governments to respond satisfactorily to these demands [by Guadalcanal people] led to the formation of a militant Guadalcanal group to press these demands by harassing (sic) Malaitans living and working in the National Capital, Honiara and the surroundings. This has in recent times led to the enforced returns of Malaitans; some whom have spent all their lives in Guadalcanal, to their territory and has involved the loss of property and tremendous amount of discomfort.⁶¹

This Peace Accord set the peace process going. The second agreement was signed on 12 August 1999. This was the Panatina Agreement. It was basically a restatement of commitment to the Honiara Peace Accord. It contained specific statements on the role of the Solomon Islands Police Force, the call for laying down of arms by the militants, and to disband organizations formed outside of law. High-ranking officials of the central and provincial governments, police department senior official, and Commonwealth Special Envoy Major General Sitiveni Rabuka with the exception of Guadalcanal militants signed the Agreement. The third peace meeting was held at Buala, the provincial center of Isabel Province. Representatives of the central government, Guadalcanal Province and the churches attended. However, due to the non-attendance of the Malaita delegation the meeting did not go well. As a result another meeting was called at Auki the provincial center of Malaita Province.

To assist in the enforcement of the Honiara and the Panatina Peace Accords a regional Police Peace Monitoring Group was formed and deployed on Guadalcanal in November 1999. The group's role was not made easy by the reluctance of militant groups to surrender their arms. Eventually and due to deteriorating situation the group had to leave earlier this year. Attempts at securing peace and reconciliation did not stop, however. At the local level the churches through the Solomon Islands Christian Association, SICA, continue to provide the opportunity and forum for peace negotiations. At the international level the Australian Government continues to give both active and logistic support in the search for peace. In October last year representatives of the national government and the two sides to the conflict signed the Townsville Peace Agreement which was basically an agreement to end hostilities and restore peace and harmony. While the general atmosphere improved as a result,



tangible progress toward restoration of peace and harmony was much slower than expected. Leaders, and specific mention needs to be made of Sir Peter Kenilorea who is Chairman of the Peace Monitoring Council, worked tirelessly and as a result the Marau Peace Agreement was signed on February 7 this year.

The road toward peace, reconciliation and restoration has begun and is continuing. There is still hope that true and genuine peace will once again prevail in the 'happy isles'. The question is 'peace in what form and at what cost?'

Two issues need to be reflected upon because of their importance in the crisis. The first is compensation, and the second is reconciliation. Compensation was a big part of the *kastom* feast. When the new government took office last year it, again, paid out millions of dollars in compensation to both sides in an effort to 'buy' peace. Somehow the compensations did not achieve the desired outcome. The question is 'why?'

Culturally compensation played a major role in the settlement of disputes, warfare, and even in the prevention of a payback killing. It was the accepted method of settlement and was done in culturally acceptable ways. The form and quantity of compensation was decided on according to cultural value system. As such compensation also had a sense of what was just in terms of the form it took, as well as the quantity.

If compensation was a time-tested and proven method of settlement, why was it not efficacious in settling the crisis? This question raises another underlying question; did compensation as practiced in culture resolved an underlying or root cause, or did it simply cover-up the cause in the hope that it would not resurface? This question perhaps moves closer to the heart of the crisis.

The issue of compensation is very much linked to reconciliation. However, could genuine reconciliation be bought? What is reconciliation anyway? Who has the legitimacy to work for reconciliation? These are important questions to address in relation to the crisis.

In relation to human experience, to reconcile is to bring back together in agreement

people who are in disagreement or who are even enemies. In Christian experience to be reconciled with God is to be brought back to God through the death of Jesus. In the words of Paul, "...God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ...and has committed to us the word of reconciliation," (2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NKJV). Three important points need to be raised in relation to this Scripture. Firstly reconciliation is the work of God. Secondly God achieved the reconciliation through Jesus Christ, and thirdly God has entrusted the Church with the ministry or word of reconciliation.

Reconciliation as the work of God. It is God who reconciles humanity to God's self and is not the work of humans. According to Robert J. Schreiter "it is God who initiates and carries through the reconciliation, and this done by the death of Christ...it is something we discover rather than achieve."⁶² What this means also is that reconciliation is more a spirituality than a strategy.⁶³ A spirituality because it recognizes God's initiative and responds to that initiative. This understanding flies in the face of efforts to reconcile the two groups on Guadalcanal.

God achieved the reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This could be looked at in two ways. Firstly, because Jesus was pure and not affected by sin, which is the root cause of human separation from God, he had all the legitimacy to exercise the work of reconciliation. Jesus was not part of the sin problem. This raises the question in relation to the crisis; who has the legitimacy to take on the work of reconciliation? As has been seen previously there were various parties to the search for reconciliation. Being an issue of spirituality perhaps the Church as a mediator of God's grace⁶⁴ should follow the master's footprint and take more prominent role. But is the Church not a part/party to the crisis? If she is then what legitimacy is there for her role as mediator? Secondly, Jesus dealt with the root cause of humans' separation from God. This has a very powerful implication for true reconciliation in relation to the crisis. To start with there are human – both individual and corporate – sins that must be confessed and forgiven. Sins of greed, envy, pride, arrogance and the superiority complex. Then there is what could be called 'structural sins'. The systems, structures, policies that contain and perpetuate injustices, inequalities, imbalance of power, and inequitable distribution of the nation's wealth must be addressed. There is substance in what Schreiter says, "...there can be no reconciliation without justice. Reconciliation without justice is a mere papering



over of differences. It only leads to new outbreaks of violence and oppression. It is an attempt to establish peace without truth, and for that reason is bound to fail.⁶⁵ Reconciliation between the Malaitans and Guadalcanalians can only be genuine if the root causes of the crisis are addressed and dealt with – it is much more than just healing memories and wounds. Perhaps this is where traditional compensation falls short, and can be informed by proper social and economic analysis to establish and deal with the causes.

Finally, the ministry or word of reconciliation has been entrusted to the Church. First and foremost the Church has to assess her own position in relation to the crisis. Is she in a position to exercise both her mediating and prophetic role in the crisis? If in the affirmative then how does she go about in exercising the Gospel of love and reconciliation in practical ways?

Schreiter discusses some resources that could assist the Church in her ministry of reconciliation. These resources are internal to the Church and I would like to conclude this section with two of these.⁶⁶ The first one is ritual and its power. Rituals have the inbuilt ability or power to touch our lives, to articulate deeply felt emotions that remain unspoken over time. Where words cannot tell rituals dig deep and expose or declare it. The cultural practice of compensation is a ritual. When root causes of crises are identified and dealt with, when issues of injustice are corrected – in other words when the conditions are right, or when there is solemnity - the compensation ritual can become a very meaningful and powerful act of reconciliation. The most important Christian ritual is the Eucharist or Sacrament of Holy Communion. Although Eucharistic theologies and practices differ from church to church, the need for deliverance from suffering and violence, the need for healing of wounds, and the hope for a new future, can actually draw people together round the communion table. Nowhere else is the pain and suffering as well as joy and hope perfectly reflected than in the body and blood, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The second resource that the Church has to assist her in the ministry of reconciliation is the cross. The cross is a symbol of two realities. The cross is “at once an instrument of torture and the throne of God...the cross sums up the paradox of our world and of the God who relates to that world...the cross stands in the midst of that

world so that we might never forget the anguish of broken bodies and spirits, but also so that we might not lose hope.”⁶⁷

The symbol of the cross perhaps does not have a cultural equivalent in the context of the crisis on Guadalcanal. It is God’s supreme act of sacrifice so that reconciliation is made available for our common discovery and sustenance. However, it must be borne in mind that the symbols are not magic. The symbols must be allowed to reach and touch the heart of the individual as well as the community, for beyond the bread (or wafer) and the cross stands both the deep mystery and reality in Christ for our common life together.

Summary

The crisis on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands has been presented and perceived as an ‘ethnic tension’ – hatred and enmity between the two ethnic groups of Guadalcanal and Malaita. This understanding of the crisis cannot be completely wrong. The Solomon Islands is an island nation of great and significant diversity not least in terms of languages. Tensions can and do arise due to this diversity. It was within the context of cultural diversity that Christianity (the Gospel) was brought to the islands. This Gospel of love was already wrapped in western forms so that it was these forms that constituted the most observable and practiced aspects of Christianity. Did Christianity bridge the diversity through the Gospel of love? To a good extent it did but it is also true that cultural diversity continues to prevail and allegiance to ethnic origin or attachment is still strong. The weak sense of a ‘national consciousness’ could perhaps be understood in the light of all this. It is because of this that ethnicity, as a factor in the crisis cannot be ruled out completely. However, it would be too simplistic and unrealistic to try to understand the crisis purely on ethnic grounds.

A more informed and adequate understanding of the crisis would include socio-economic and political factors. These factors include the system of government, resource use and development and benefits from their development. It includes also the implications of population movement, especially for host people, their resources, and the benefits they receive from the development of such resources. Are people involved in the decision-making process in relation to the development of resources? Do they receive a just return or share for the development of such



resources? In other words is there justice in the systems, structures, laws, and policies that are instituted and are supposed to benefit the people? These are some of the underlying factors.

But justice is perhaps not all that easy to define and quantify. There is a cultural understanding of justice but there are also philosophical and theological understandings. Cultural understanding of justice is based on societal morals and values. A philosophical understanding can be based on utility, fairness and distributive (structural justice) or minimal state regulation (the basis for capitalistic private ownership and market mechanism). Theologically justice is rooted in faith; it is rooted in the God of love and justice. From this point of departure justice is commutative, social, distributive, liberation and nothing short of perfect love. What justice is, therefore, in relation to the crisis depends on where one begins but from a Christian perspective both the cultural and philosophical understanding should be informed by some theological understanding.

Several attempts have been made to try to secure peace and reconciliation. The international community, national and provincial governments, the churches, and militant group representatives have all been involved at one point or another. Millions of dollars have been spent on compensations to both groups involved in the crisis. Everybody wanted reconciliation but it always seemed out of reach. Why?

Compensations did not produce the efficacious results they used to perhaps because they were applied to more deep-seated structural sins that, perhaps, needed prior attention and action.

*Reconciliation was seen more as a strategy than spirituality –
as something to be achieved rather than discovered.*

*However, reconciliation is the work of God,
which we must discover*

Such discovery is not a passive discovery; it is a live, dynamic and change-seeking discovery. In other words the human agent also has a part to play in the process of reconciliation and securing peace. The following words of the Chairman of the

Peace Monitoring Council during the signing of the Marau Peace Agreement makes this clear, "we must maintain our enthusiasm despite our minor setbacks and slower progress than expected...It would be easy to become discouraged; however, we should remember that while peace is easily shattered, it is not so easily restored."⁶⁸ Reconciliation also means dealing with the root causes of the crisis in as much as Jesus, God's agent of reconciliation, dealt with the root cause of our separation from God and from one another. The Church, in her role as mediator of God's Grace and both custodian and herald of the Gospel, must follow the Master's footsteps in and toward the path of reconciliation. However, she must beware lest her legitimacy in the exercise of her all-important role comes into disrepute. The Church is rich in heritage to exercise such a role.

End Notes

1 Tarcius Tara, "*Beyond Ethnicity: The Political Economy of the Guadalcanal Crisis in the Solomon Islands*". This is yet an unpublished Paper. Tarcius is a lecturer at the University of the South Pacific and is from Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

2 Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Continuum, 1970)

3 Tara, 1.

4 Tara, 1-2.

5 John Garrett, To Live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1982), 179.

6 Judith A. Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons: A History of a Pacific Archipelago, 1800-1978 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), 1, 103-105.

7 Mary MacDonald, "Melanesian Communities: Past and Present," in An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, ed. Darrell L. Whiteman (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), 213-214. See also Bennett, 14-15.

8 Bennett, 14. See also MacDonald, 216.

9 Kenneth McElhanon & Darrell Whiteman, "Kinship: Who is Related to Whom," in An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, ed. Darrell Whiteman (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984), 110-116.

10 A national census was conducted last year but I do not have the report with me. This figure is an estimate based on the 1992 population figure of 365,000 at a growth



rate of 3.5 percent per year. The 1992 figure is taken from Manfred Ernst, Winds of Change: Rapidly Growing Religious Groups in the Pacific Islands (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches, 1994), 115.

11 Ernst, 115.

12 Darrell Whiteman, "Communicating Across Cultures," in An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures (Goroka: The Melanesian Institute, 1984) 56.

13 Amos N. Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1964), 13.

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15 St Augustine, "The Morals of the Catholic Church," in From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics, ed. Wayne G. Boulton, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 235.

16 Anton Wessels, Europe: Was it Ever Really Christian? (London: SCM Press, 1994), 17.

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20 Garrett, 297.

21 Stephen B. Bevans, Models of Contextual Theology, (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 33.

22 As quoted by Garrett, 184-185.

23 Bennett, 327.

24 Christian Jourdan as quoted by Tara, 10.

25 Moffat Wasuka, "Education," in Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands, The Past Four Thousand Years, ed. Hugh Laracy (Suva: USP, 1989), 94.

26 John Ipo, "Land and Development," in Ples Blong Iumi: Solomon Islands, The Past Four Thousand Years, ed. Hugh Laracy (Suva: USP, 1989), 122.

27 Tarcius Tara, interview with author, 25 August 2000.

28 Joe Holland & Peter Henriot, S. J., Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice, (Washington: Center for Concern, 1980), 10.

29 Tara, 1.

30 Bennett, 327.

31 Tara, 13.

32 Bennett, 327.

33 Information obtained from Milner Tozaka, special consultant on the review of the Provincial Government System, July 1999.

34 Tara, 13.

- 35 Sam Alasia, "Population Movement," in Ples Blong Iumi, 114.
- 36 Alasia, 118.
- 37 Alasia, 119.
- 38 Tara, interview with author, 25 August 2000.
- 39 Bennett, 327.
- 40 As quoted by Tara, 12.
- 41 Tara, 12.
- 42 As quoted by Tara, 12.
- 43 Ennio Mantovani, "Traditional Values and Ethics," in An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures, 200-202.
- 44 Karen Lebacqz, Six Theories of Justice: Perspectives from Philosophical and Theological Ethics, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 21.
- 45 Lebacqz, 40.
- 46 Lebacqz, 58.
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- 48 Lebacqz, 91.
- 49 Lebacqz, 92.
- 50 Lebacqz, 109.
- 51 Gideon Zoleveke, "Traditional Ownership and Land Policy," in Land in the Solomon Islands, ed. Peter Larmour, (Suva: USP, 1979), 1.
- 52 Rick Giddings, "Land Tenure," in An Introduction to Melanesian Cultures.
- 53 Zoleveke, 4.
- 54 Tara, 12.
- 55 Ipo, 122-123.
- 56 Zoleveke, 4.
- 57 See Euan McPhee, "Developing a Theological Basis for a Land Ethic," in Ecotheology 1 (July 1996): 43-52.
- 58 Walter Brueggemann, The Land, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).
- 59 Robert J. Schreiter, Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order, (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 1.
- 60 The only hard evidence I have of these attempts are those contained in Tara, 16-18.
- 61 Honiara Peace Accord, 28 June 1999 as quoted by Tara, 5.
- 62 Schreiter, 43.
- 63 Schreiter, 60.
- 64 Schreiter, 64.
- 65 Schreiter, 65.
- 66 Schreiter, 74-79.



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The following four articles were presented orally at a Workshop "Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Land and Identity in the Pacific" held in Fiji in September, 2000. The Workshop was organised by the World Council of Churches Indigenous Peoples' Programme, the Pacific Desk of the World Council of Churches and the Pacific Conference of Churches. The Statement from the Workshop follows the articles.

Safeguarding Culture, Identity and Land

Introduction

The theme of this workshop is "Indigenous Peoples Struggle for Land and Identity in the Pacific". I have been asked to address the issue of "Safeguarding Culture, Identity and Land Property" and in particular to share experiences with women's initiatives on the above topic, namely the relationship between safeguarding culture and identity, and the commercial ventures of handicrafts by village women.

In trying to address these broad issues I have decided to share with you my own experiences, observations and analysis, speaking from a perspective of an indigenous woman, activist in the struggle for Vanuatu independence, Christian, western educated journalist, community educator and a former participant in western governance and democratic institutions.

The question that comes automatically to mind is "How can we safeguard land, culture and identity in the Pacific that has gone through foreign invasion, domination, colonialism, religion since the fifteenth century? Which culture do we safeguard? What makes that culture important to safeguard?



Motarilavaoa Hilda

Lini

*Director, Pacific Concerns
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To address the issue of land, identity and culture in the 21st century means that discussions that began in the fifteenth century among our ancestors when first contact with foreigner was made, has not been solved and until respect is paid it is going to continue.

Today the soul of the Pacific continues to search for peace and its natural identity among value conflicts, religions conflicts, relationship conflicts, information conflicts, institutional and structural conflicts, leadership and democratic conflicts, economic interest conflicts and most important is land and cultural conflicts.

Background

Twenty five years ago the Pacific Conference of Churches having been concerned about existing social injustices spearheaded the calling of Churches and peoples movements to identify issues that continue to threaten people's lives in a predominantly Christian society of the Pacific and at the same time define programmes to redress the situation.

I am reminded that it is the Pacific Conference of Churches that played an active role in co-ordinating meetings of Pacific non-governmental organizations which led to the formation of what is today known as the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement. When I look back I wonder whether the churches, in our Pacific way, at that time ever predicted then that they were contributing in shaping activists, leaders of liberation movements and radical organizations.

The scope of issues that the Pacific islands have encountered then have since increased both proportionally and in complexity that we are reminded of our responsibilities in re-defining what life holds for our future generation.

I therefore take this opportunity to congratulate the World Council of Churches and the Pacific Conference of Churches in organizing this workshop to address the fundamental issues affecting land, the very soul of the Pacific.

Status of Pacific land, culture and identity

The Pacific as we know it is a home for millions of people. We are spiritually connected to our indigenous origins, land, language, genealogy, kinship and distinct cultures.



We still maintain strong family ties, clan, tribes and we live in communities. We agree on consensus and we still believe strongly in collective or communal ownership of land, all cultural heritage, collective responsibilities, obligations and the chiefly systems. These contribute to our Pacific identity.

However over the centuries the Pacific has encountered different waves of invasion over our defenseless region. It began with the wave of European contact, then the wave of Western colonization, wave of slave trade, wave of Asian migrant workers and merchants, wave of western religions and education, wave of Pacific nationalism and land rights, wave of militarization, wave of constitutional democracies and governance which re-established independence and sovereignty, wave of aid dependency and wave of economic globalization. We are now being challenged by the wave of re-indigenization.

My analysis of the Pacific community is that it is categorized into four broad various identities:

The original indigenous societies; rural Christianized societies with strong links to cultural practices allowed by churches; urban Christianized societies with less affiliation to cultural obligations. Westernized educated societies that do not align themselves to communities or churches.

On the question of which culture identity and land should be safeguarded, I would address the importance of safeguarding the original Indigenous Peoples, their land, culture and identity, and the rural and urban Christian societies. The reasons being that they still maintain communal concept of living practice spirituality and uphold social values. However, the Christian churches need to respect the original indigenous societies wishes to remain in their own spiritual ways.

Of the four categories the original indigenous societies are in peace, the other three categories continue to undergo conflicts now taking place in the Pacific.

These conflicts are not co-incidental, the crises must be seen as the soul of the Pacific in constant pain, crying out aloud and warning us to re-examine our past, redefine our peaceful co-existence with others who share the land with us and to pay respect where it is due in order to heal the past damage and restore the natural elements needed for the future generations to inherit what we have enjoyed.

Protection of original indigenous societies as a key to safeguarding land, culture and identity

In the past twenty five years I have observed, experienced and analyzed different state of peoples lives, in rural communities and urban cities of the Pacific, as well as in the global community. I also had the opportunity to live in different cultures, experiencing their level of insecurity as they strive for identity. The most important experience for me has been living in indigenous communities that have never been Christianized or colonized. I have since come to believe that the indigenous world needs every form of protection from all states or religions because of the wisdom and values that they continue to uphold to life and environment. In Vanuatu they are a small minority existing on six islands, however they are not respected and are being constantly told to accept Christianity and western education.

There are seven indigenous communities on my home island. They have established governance and systems of everything and are characterized by their following distinct identity:

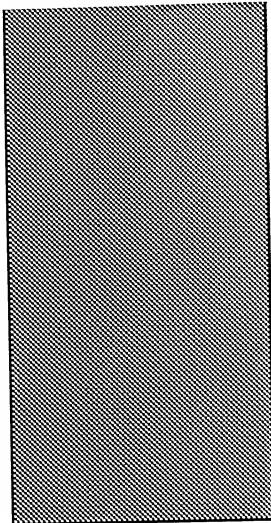
1. They have a creation story on which their belief system and spirituality are founded;
2. Land is owned communally and distributed for use by land administrator;
3. All functions and activities are regulated by the natural laws of society;
4. They live in harmony with all other life forms and are in constant communication with the spiritual world;
5. They possess the wisdom and knowledge on how to interact with the sun's energy in their activities;
6. Each of the seven communities live under one leader whose leadership role is supported by different specialized skilled men and women who make every decision by consensus;
7. Communal living is their way of life, they own everything collectively and they have collective responsibility to community welfare, peace, security, truth and justice;
8. Individuals rights and freedom is guaranteed within the scope of communal rights and freedom;
9. Peace is paramount and everything is conducted in peaceful and respectful manner;



10. Disturbance to peace is urgently compensated for, peace is restored and peace making takes place between two parties;
11. All male members live and eat in men's sacred houses where they are educated while girls live in family homes and are educated by their mothers and other wise women;
12. There are very clear defined roles for the old, men, women, young and the children, all strenuous jobs are performed by men;
13. The main activities of these communities are economic production and trading at ceremonies
14. They control their own health and medicine, social security, food security, economic means and political stability;
15. They make their own clothes, produce their own currencies, have their own doctors and surgeons;
16. Women and men are very skilful in their roles as scientists, engineers, inventors, technologists, farmers, educators, health workers, economic managers, producers and traders.

Land, Culture and Identity Crises

This brings me to the last part of the topic on women's initiatives and the relationship between safeguarding culture and identity and the commercial ventures of handicrafts by village women. It is obvious that in westernized or Christian communities of the Pacific, there is cultural and identity crises. While we still own our lands and respect our indigenous land tenure, these lands have also become subjects of constitutions and western land laws that need careful monitoring to ensure their proper protection. While we assert our identity by speaking our languages, wearing our indigenous costumes, making crafts, singing and performing our dances, most of these have lost their originality and are valued and used to suit modern expectations. In westernized communities women continue to make handicrafts as a source of income while others use their skills in paid employment. The land we are connected to is there but we now have a choice. Our choice is to live on the land, assert our identity, and live culturally or to join the global movement and the labour market where we become just another human being defined by laws and our culture and identity controlled by others.



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Land and Globalization

Introduction

It is my pleasant task to stand before you to convey our deepest gratitude on behalf of our organization to the Indigenous Peoples' Program and Pacific Desk of the World Council of Churches and the Pacific Council of Churches for inviting me as a speaker-participant panelist in this encounter "Indigenous Struggle for Land and Identity". This encounter is very challenging and very sensitive in the Pacific as we gather here to take stock of our past history, our present, and replenish our weakness and strategize our direction for the future to continue our struggle for protect our mama land from invasion by global forces.

Our past history guides us to deal with land issues carefully. We have seen what happened in Papua New Guinea and Bougainville, we have seen what happened/is happening in the Solomon Islands, even recently in Fiji. These groups of Melanesian countries are struggling to maintain their land and identity as peoples of that land. These conflicts that we are experiencing in Melanesia is a result of major financial institutions dictating our government to protect their interest and not the interest of the civil society.



Therefore people rise up and fight each other without knowing that the very problems are created by the major financial institutions' ignorance of respect to peoples' cultures and identities. We work for the civil society and therefore play a vital role in informing the civil society of possible impacts to land if such policies developed by the major financial institutions like World Bank, IMF, ADB, etc., are to be implemented by the respective governments of the Pacific. Pacific countries are vulnerable (as they say); our governments tend to accept reform policies dictated by or forced onto them by the WB/IMF. Papua New Guinea is no exception.

Land Ownership in Papua New Guinea

Land to us is very special. Land is Peoples' Identity. Our connection with the land is somewhat spiritual and natural. It is our most valuable asset; everyone owns land, uses it, eats out of it, and is buried in it upon death. The relationship is neither individualistic nor really materialistic. We have an interest in anything found on or associated with the land. Land to us means survival. It is our Life. It is our Identity.

Papua New Guinea is a Melanesian nation of 4.6 million people located north of Australia and southeast of Asia. It is a culturally diverse nation made up of a multitude of ethnic groups speaking at least 800 languages. In most areas rights to land and other resources are vested in customary groups such as clans.

Land and land ownership is central to Papua New Guinean peoples' sense of identity. Over 97% of land is owned communally under 'customary title', with the balance being primarily land alienated under the Australian colonial administration for government or commercial purposes. Transfer of rights in land is usually understood by customary landowners to be only temporary, regardless of the provision in agreement, laws etc. Land dealings undertaken by central government without the agreement of the customary landowners are frequently not recognized as valid by the latter. An example is the Bougainville Copper Mine land and resources.

Land Laws in Papua New Guinea

Customary land is defined by law to mean land which is owned and possessed by an automatic citizen of community by virtue of rights of a proprietary possession kind which belong to that citizen or community and arise from and are regulated by custom.

Section 2(2) and Section 38 of the National Constitution states that: the State has territorial sovereignty over the land and natural resources of its territory (S.2(2)) and it may make laws for public purposes in, say, public order and welfare (S.38).

World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) Land Reform Policy in Papua New Guinea

For a long time after 1964 the first World Bank delegation to Papua New Guinea made this very recommendation in their report: ‘That the type of land tenure system of land ownership we have in PNG where land is owned by customary clan groups is not conducive or appropriate for development’.

Eight years ago the Government of Papua New Guinea developed a Bill as part of the sponsored WB and IMF Structural Adjustment Program (WB/IMF-SAP) to change the customary land tenure system. The proposal was that landowners register their land and enable the government to look after it.

The WB/IMF sponsored SAP imposed 27 policy matrix (conditions) upon the Government of PNG after the Hard Kina Policy introduced by Sir Julius Chan in 1990 collapsed. The Government of PNG was forced to change laws regarding the land to facilitate the implementation of the Land Mobilization Program. Through the National Government, the WB/IMF had given Henao Lawyers until 31 December 1995 to come with the legislation for registration of customary land. The primary purpose of the land reform policy was to set in place a system of compulsory registration of customary land and its potential for commercial purposes.

Peoples’ Reaction to the WB/IMF Land Policy

The Non-Government Organizations, churches and students informed the communities of possible impacts registration would have on their lives if implemented. There was an outcry. This has given rise to mobilization and demonstration outside the National Parliament house and elsewhere in the country by NGOs, churches, unions, tertiary students and the public.

They said, “Our great ancestors have looked after our land; we have always looked after our land for generations, and will continue to look after our land”. The lawyer drafting the Bill visited Enga Province, but had to fly away in a helicopter. People



were frustrated; they wanted to cut him to bits and pieces.

This resulted in the proposed customary land registration being temporarily shelved, meaning the proposal will resume any time after things get back to normal. While the proposal is temporarily shelved, efforts are being made towards making the public aware of the possible re-introduction of the Land Reform Policy.

Views against the Land Registration

1. Customary land under the traditional tenure system is securely attached to traditional customary landowners. The land is communally held for present and future generations. The security of title over customary land therefore is not a concern for the traditional landowners but is for the business people, organizations and companies, and obviously for the World Bank, IMF and Aus-Aid.
2. Land is life and survival for landowners. The landowners cannot buy money with land. Land is not a saleable commodity.
3. Customary title to land is sufficiently determined in accordance with the custom of each area. This means title to customary land is determined and regulated by custom, not by law.
4. Under existing law, traditional customary land is governed by custom. Customary landowners are prohibited from private dealing with non-automatic citizens except through the National Government by lease, purchase or compulsory with other automatic citizens in accordance with custom.
5. Under Land (Tenure Convention) Act 1964, customary landowners would apply to the Land Title Commission for a conversion order to convert customary title to freehold or free simple title.
6. Under both the Land Act and the Land (Tenure Conversion) Act, customary land is alienated by choice, but only through the Government.

Views for Land Registration

The WB/IMF push for land registration and increased plantation, liberalized trade, wage freeze, deregulate trade and open economy, all point to this result for indigenous people of PNG:

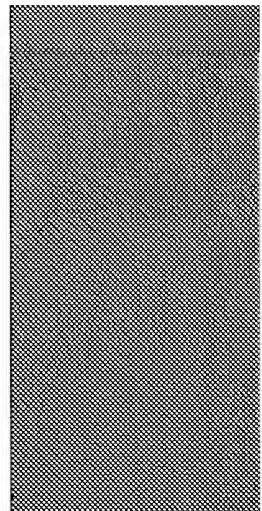
1. Customary land tenure is the biggest threat to economic development in PNG.
“This analysis was being used by a highly paid consultant from AusAid and

World Bank who was ignorant of our customs and significance of our land tenure system that safeguards the social and economic needs of our people and has done so for thousands of years.

2. Ways have been found to secure loans on unregistered customary land. Some banks are not prepared to move away from the standard mortgage as a guarantee for loans. There are existing mechanisms through the Land (Tenure Conversion) Act for those Papua New Guineans who wish to change their land from customary land tenures into freehold. Only citizens can own freehold estates.
3. We urged that there were adequate legal mechanisms available for those who wished to engage in land transactions.
4. We were concerned that Land Reforms would reduce the common law rights to sue for environmental damage resulting from mining, logging and palm oil plantations.



Land Administration in Vanuatu



Kali Vatoko

My involvement in this seminar is the first time after many years that the church has been directly involved with land issue, and also indigenization.

Pre-Independence period

Prior to Independence the New Hebrides was jointly administered by both the British and the French and any land dealings went through the Joint Administration. At that time the land was in danger of being bought up by speculators from USA and France. Church leaders like Fr Walter Lini and others banded together to try and protect the land from exploitation. This developed into a national political movement that freed our country from France and Britain.

Post Independence

At the time of Independence in 1980 all the lands in the Republic of Vanuatu were given back to the indigenous landowners. The Alienated Land Act was passed to give three months notice to all those non-citizens currently entitled to land rights in Vanuatu to express their interest either to continue under new agreements with the custom landowners or to cease their leases. Church treated like

everybody else as an alienator of land. Lands department was established to administer all land leases dealings in Vanuatu except the freehold titles. Land Surveys Office was established to carry out surveys and survey areas of land for leasing purposes. Land records (Lands Registry Office) was established to register and keep records of all land leases in Vanuatu.

Introduction of the Vanuatu Land Use Planning Project (LUPP)

Government needed a more useful information about land in Vanuatu to encourage economic development. People from outside influencing us, financed by Australian Government looking to set up better land management in the republic of Vanuatu. In October 1995, a LUPP was established in Vanuatu with financial technical assistance from Australian Government to look into setting up the mechanisms for better planning and management of lands and the resources thereon for the entire Republic of Vanuatu.

Its aim is to establish the National Land Use Planning and management strategies for the Republic of Vanuatu. To introduce the National Land Use Policy for the Vanuatu. To create National Land Use zones for all islands in Vanuatu.

It has for its Objectives :

- 1) Create Provincial Strategic Land Use Plan and Management strategies for the six (6) provinces.
- 2) Prepare Local Area Management Plans and Action Plans.
- 3) Create a database of the Natural Resources Information and the Social Information as a planning tool. Some NGOs worried that this would fall into the wrong hands and result in exploitation.

The nature of LUPP was rather like an educational institution, carries out consultation meetings/awareness workshops/training/seminars etc. Planning and management training workshops, meetings, and activities were carried out in an integrated approach system that involves the Government agencies, non government agencies, the Provincial offices and the communities at large at all three levels; national, provincial and communal.

These were done by establishing Pilot Projects in all provinces as Models for Planning and Management of land and the resources thereon. Training on how to use computers for planning was carried out for all government line agencies/provinces/



NGOs. Training on how to use VanRIS as a planning tool. VanRIS= Computerised information on the Vanuatu Resource Information System.

The following have been accomplished : National Land Use has been established; National Land Use Policy in use; and National Land Use Zones completed.

Effectiveness

The Policy is in use by all government departments with vested interest in land/ custom landowners/overseas investors/schools for teaching students in geography and social science and development studies. Vanuatu Foreign Investment Board uses the policy during meetings. Lands Department is using the policy for advice in land matter such as leases. All provinces use the policy for their own future plans. Planners such as infrastructure planners as well as others use the policy.

Foreign investors use the new system established by Vanuatu Land Use Planning for their investment interests in Vanuatu as this provides them with a clear resource information and planning.

There is clear evidence that those with vested interest in land and the resources and custom landowners are making use of the policy/zonings/national land use plan. This gives us an indication that the general public recognizes Land Use Planning and its importance.

Comprehensive Reform Programme (CRP) 1998

This reform recognizes the importance of proper planning and management of the land and the resources. It promotes the idea of proper planning and management of the resources and encourages investors to invest in land in Vanuatu. It also recognizes the importance of proper planning and management of the land and the resources. Oil exploration wanted to develop; – province and government wanted it, but the people rejected it and the development did not go ahead.

Currently undertake to introduce first Lands Tribunal August 2000

With financial assistance from the New Zealand Government, the Lands Department is able to carry out consultative meetings in the provinces and in Port Vila and Luganville as a prerequisite to setting up the first Lands Tribunal for Vanuatu.

Hopefully legislation will be drafted and be presented to Parliament at the end of this year 2000. Previously cases went up to High Court, and now there is a backlog of cases.

Re-Establishment of the Lands Referee Office 2001

The Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources will re-establish the Lands Referee Office in 2001. Aim: To look into and solve differences in land values.

Conclusion:

The Ministry of Lands has the sole administration of the lands in Vanuatu except the customary lands. Administration remains the same, except some improvements to enhance the administration/planning/management of the lands and the resources. Ministry of Lands responsibilities: Administer State lands/leases/valuations of land and properties on the land/survey controls/registration of all registered lands/ Planning and management of the land and the resources at the National level.

Private Surveys: Ministry may contract survey works to private survey companies. Courts: Legal issues concerning land matters in relation to land leases.

Provinces: Have mandate under the Comprehensive Reform Program to create their own plans as to how to develop and manage their own lands and the resources.

Lands Tribunal: Will deal with customary land disputes. All Provinces will have their own Lands Tribunal under the forthcoming Lands Tribunal Act, yet to be passed by Parliament.

Ministry of Provincial Affairs: Rural Economic Development Initiatives: creates Economic Development Plans for each province. (This has been done for one Province in 1999 and the plan for a second Province is about to be completed).



We Should Know Who We Are, What We Are, and Where We Came From!

In dealing with lands of the indigenous people, we should know who we are, what we are and where did we come from. This involves land but also customs, cultures, and even our songs and dances. We are Maori by origin, we are not Cook Islanders by right, and we are the Maori people of Polynesia, well established in the triangle of the Pacific region. We were there a lot more than 2,000 years ago before any white man sailed the Pacific Ocean. We never believed that the world is flat. This was why we were not afraid to sail as far as we could go on open canoe. Our ancestors came from Avaiki Pa Mamao. The far away land, the motherland of the Maori people of the Cook Islands. Who knows, according to some legend carried from mouth-to-mouth we could be one of the lost tribes of the children of Israel. But forget that. Over 2000 years ago our ancestors were great sailors, navigators, using the stars moon and sun as their guides. They left their motherland, Ariki, which was believed south of Asia; they were looking for new lands as well as adventure. That was what their blood was telling them. We still have that same blood today. To prove that fact we went on canoes to Tahiti to protest against the French bombing testing in Muroroa. We went to the Marshall Islands and from there,

*Tuti Tarinceo,
Cook Islands*

on to Hawaii and back home. Two canoes went. We also went to Samoa a few years ago, and to Tonga and on to Aotearoa and back. Today (2000) our islanders are now in Australia on a canoe to see the Olympics. Yes they left their motherland Awaikii on big double-hulled canoes, not knowing there is a strong current moving from west to east in the Pacific, but they cared not, they knew the wind; trusted them as well as the mighty roaring seas of the Pacific. They chanted their request in prayer to Tangaroa, the god of the ancient people, sea, and wind according to their belief, and also the god of the Polynesian race. That was their belief, and this is what they chanted

*Tangaroa I te titi,
Tangaroa I te tata
Eueu ake na te rangi
Kia tae te vaka ki uta*

*Tangaroa supreme on High,
Tangaroa supreme below,
Open up the sky
So that we can reach the land.*

That was their prayer to their God in those ancient days. And it did happen. The waves and the wind obeyed them, obeyed their prayer, they came with their languages, cultures, customs, songs and their dances. Several canoes came at the time, not just one. Not only men are great sailors, but also the women. On each canoe there was a leader, a chief, and sub-chiefs, the younger brothers of the chiefs. They were all from the same tribe, clan, they all have true blood relations.

During those days their lives were of the Pacific ocean, tiny little dots of islands, about the size of a full stop, according to the map of the world. Never been heard of and these islands were living peacefully under the sun. There were 15 altogether, (the national flag shows 15 stars, each representing one of the islands of the Cook Islands). The land was shared among those that came on the canoe, and confirmed the chief as their leader. To confirm their leadership a royal court, a marae was erected. And the investiture of the chief was performed on the marae. That was the system of investiture of the new chief in the land from where they came, and that custom is still held today. That was the beginning of new generations, and new



genealogies of the royal family of each island in the Cook Islands. After the investiture, two special pieces of land were set aside for the chief, who is the titleholder. It becomes a custom that a certain piece of land of the tribe or clan is set aside exclusively for the use of the people holding that office. Two types of land are recognized for that purpose:

- 1) *Enua ariki taoanga* - Land set aside to support the function and responsibilities of the titleholders.
- 2) *Enua rautao* - Land set aside for the production of food crops to support the titleholder and his family.

These special pieces of land are those which have been recognized since ancient times. The right of occupation and use invested in titleholder only and no other member of the clan is given that right.

Marae (The Royal Court)

In addition to the two special lands for the title, another very important piece of the clan's land is designated as a sacred land, especially set aside for the installation and investiture of the titleholder for the clan. This piece of land is that which has been so recognized since ancient times.

The will of the chief.

When a title holder has made a will, whether in writing or oral, designating who should be the next titleholder, such will must be disclosed to the recognized descendants of the testator who have the usual right to decide who should be the next titleholder. The successor to the title must be selected and agreed upon by those recognized descendants whose responsibility it is to make the selection of who should be the next titleholder.

In the days of our ancestors, a daughter could not be elected to any title. On the arrival of Christianity the Maori custom began to change which leads eventually to giving the daughters of the deceased title holder the right to hold the title.

The Land

In the Cook Islands, the land is owned by the tribe, but its use is with the family who occupies that land. The family consists of all the children who have a common ancestor, together with the adopted children and all the descendants who have not entered other tribes.

The control of the land rests with the head of the family but is for the support of all. The family consists of all the children who have a right to that support as well as the others of the family who may be in distress from sickness, weakness or old age.

The Power of the Chief

The people of the community respected the power of the chief and because of this, the well being of the people was kept and everyone lived in peace and harmony. The power or right of control and distribution of the land is vested in the head of the tribe or clan that is the chief. The power or right determine the distribution, occupation and use of the land.

Occupation and Use of Land

Blood right is paramount – members must have blood right to the common ancestor of the land. Unless a person has proved his or her blood relationship to the head of the clan, he or she has no right to succession and traditional title and the right of occupation and use of land.

Adoption

Maori custom recognizes two types of adoption, but only adoption by blood right that carries with it the right to succession and tradition title and the right of occupation and use of land.

Resident with Another tribe

The indigenous custom is that when a daughter of a chief marries a son of another chief and goes and lives with that tribe, the chief who is the father of the girl allocates by way of gift for his daughter's husband, a piece of the tribe's land.



Land Cannot be Sold

When Christianity was well established in the Cook Islands by Missionaries from London, they tried to convince the chiefs to sell some of their undeveloped lands to the foreigners. But the chief refused. In a declaration by the Federal Parliament of the Cook Islands in 1894, it is clearly stated that land cannot be sold but leased.

The Language

When our ancestors came from Avaiki they came with their language, their culture, songs and dancing. They knew that without the language their culture and songs would be lost. And they believed that when a language was weak, the country was also weak, and the Government weak. To the Maoris of Polynesia, language is the instrument of an empire.

STATEMENT FROM THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE PACIFIC INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' STRUGGLE FOR LAND AND IDENTITY WORKSHOP

Suva 11 – 14 September, 2000

Preamble

During the workshop we have been focussing on the following issues :

- Ø Safeguarding land, culture identity, land and property, land and globalization, land and indigenous peoples and the role of the churches and the land.
- Ø To us as Pacific Indigenous Peoples, we say that the land as our mother, known as *vanua, fenua, enua, hanua, fonua, whenua, te aba*, etc., is life, our soul and identity: land is people, resources, cultures, beliefs spirituality, languages, chiefly system and sea. Because of this the sovereignty of our land is important and as Pacific Indigenous Peoples, we will strongly defend to the end our ownership and sovereignty of our land. With this understanding the issue at stake that raises questions to us are :
 - * “How should the Church receive and care for other ethnic groups?”
 - * “What is the position of the Church and what should it be regarding human rights when the crisis of land and indigenization come to the fore?”
 - * “How can we live effectively as Christians in two worlds as contemporary Christians and Indigenous?”
- Ø Our theological understanding of the land in the water is one of ‘God’s garden’. God is speaking to us in this garden. God is always working in the garden. We are all co-workers in the garden and we are to take care of it because we have



been all asked to work with God. There is a place for everyone in the garden and for every tool to be used. The purpose of the garden is to grow, to bloom, flower and to give fruit. There is continuous change in the garden to accommodate the new members and the old and new tools that have come. Yet these changes are received and accepted with responsibilities as we are stewards of the garden, to plant and tend as the owner plans.

In receiving the presentation from the speakers, who are actually experiencing the struggle of land and identity, we have been called, those of us who are present, to be MIDWIVES. Midwives to participate in the birthing and ushering in of the new Pacific. The challenge that comes is one of remembering and articulating our history. So the issue of land, history and identity is the main burning issue of the region. The group that does not know and remember its history does not know its future, and does not know where it is going, like a coconut floating on the sea.

In order for midwives to prepare for the birthing of the new Pacific, we need to articulate the theology of the land to determine the birthing of tomorrow. The theology of the land needs to be articulated as soon as possible.

Statement

1. We, the people and the Church in the Pacific, of many origins as we are, make a commitment on behalf of the churches to move together recognizing the gifts of one another.
2. We value the unique status of the Pacific Indigenous Peoples as the original owners and stewards of land and waters.
3. We recognize continuing customary laws, beliefs and traditions that respect human values, and through the land and its first people we may taste this spirituality and rejoice in its grandeur.
4. We acknowledge most Pacific lands were colonized without the consent of our people.
5. As Pacific Indigenous Peoples, we express our sorrow and profoundly regret the injustices of the past.
6. Our nations must have the courage to own the truth, and to heal the wounds of our past so that we can walk together at peace with ourselves.
7. As indigenous Peoples we desire a future where we encourage the continuing

- building of Pacific communities of caring, sharing and belonging where everyone enjoys equal rights and share opportunities and responsibilities according to our aspirations.
8. We pledge ourselves to promote justice, address disadvantages, work for reconciliation and to respect the rights of the Indigenous Peoples to determine their destiny.

Book Review: *Bridges in Spirituality. First Nations Christian Women Tell their Stories.* As told to Joyce Carlson and Alf Dumont

The United Church Publishing House, Canada, 1997

Reviewed by Asilina Davila Toganivalu, Education Officer, Unicef Pacific Office, Suva, Fiji

Bridges in Spirituality is a compelling story of five twentieth century contemporary Christian women of the First Nations of Canada and their journey of self discovery in what must have been a terribly confusing period. The anecdotes convey the breadth and complexity of women's lives in particular about these five women.

Their story takes us through the period of Canada's early colonisation and how families were exposed to both positive as well as many negative influences during such an era. The massive metamorphosis which occurred can largely be contributed to two powerful forces that disrupted and intruded into the lives of native Canadians at the time. One was colonisation and the other was Christianity both of which brought about such complex changes in addition to introducing their new sets of values.

It is a story of courage and resilience, about the women who survived many forms



of hardship and personal conflicts because of race, violence and abuse and yet managed to keep their humanity intact. Thanks to the silent wisdom of the First Nations elders that these women were connected to during their early and formative years that they were able to respond so resiliently to the massive changes in their world. Such things as inter cultural marriages brought about even more conflicts within their own immediate families and communities. All of them however, became bridge builders able to live in two worlds and continued to maintain their own cultural traditions and identity.

Although there are many similarities among the women each one was unique and stood out in her own way. For just as Christian women today are linked spiritually each must walk their own way and weave their own pattern.

Women the world over today are still coming to terms with similar experiences and issues. Indigenous women are speaking more confidently about their unique concerns and have gained strong support from their sisters in the developed world. Women are much more connected to one another and there is now a global movement trying to put women's issues at the centre of the world stage. We are living in an exciting and a very fast changing world but are there any worthwhile lessons we can learn from the stories in Bridges in Spirituality

What came out strongly in the book for me as universal and timeless lessons were:

- The centrality of family and the complex kinship structure
- The importance of family and community relationships
- The importance of traditions and cultures
- The importance of spirituality and Christian beliefs
- That children and elders are important
- That education is important
- The sacredness of nature and the environment
- That everyone is one
- That there are clear conflicts between what is taught at home, in school and what one learns outside those walls.
- And that cultural traditions and the understandings of Christ can be deeply connected but one needs to find the balance.

On a personal level, I find myself relating so readily to these women. Three very influential women in my life were my grandmother, mother and aunt, who were steeped in their own culture and traditions as well as being Christians. Had my mother and aunt been alive now they would have been their contemporaries. My grandmother appeared to have been around a lot more for the six siblings in my family when we were growing up and the stories, songs and lullabies we learned from her have been further transmitted to our own children. My mother and aunt were so preoccupied with household chores like cooking, weaving, sewing and were often taken up with those tasks with everyone having fairly clear and defined roles in the household.

Although they never had the kind of western education that all my siblings and I were privileged to have, nonetheless their wise guidance, example, and dedicated care during the hard times we were growing up in our island environment has prepared us for the present. Often I still imagine hearing their voices clearly telling me something that I needed clarifying on traditional or cultural obligations. Its moments such as these that I realise how much I had learned from them.

I would like to end with a quotation from one of the women in the story, Gladys Taylor Cook who is still continuing to work as a counsellor and advocate for her native people, 'Life is a journey and we have the chance to keep learning and growing'



Book Review: *The Religious Heritage of Japan. Foundations for Cross-Cultural Understanding in a Religiously Plural World.*
Edited by John Ross Carter

Book East, P.O. Box 13352, Portland, or 97213 U.S.A. ISBN:0-9647040-4-8

Reviewed by Tessa Mackenzie

One of the most difficult things for Christians to do is to engage in dialogue and discussion with people of other religious traditions. Having added "only" to the words in the Gospel of John "I am the way, the truth, and the life" to reinforce our belief in the exclusivity of Christianity, and with the heavy emphasis on the need to convert all others to our way of thinking, we Christians are at a distinct disadvantage. Yet the reality is that we live in a religiously plural world which with the continued increase in ease of communication means that we cannot ignore others. There is a rich diversity out there which can give us a deeper understanding of our own faith tradition if we are brave enough to venture into exploration.

This book, which consists of a series of lectures on the religious traditions of Japan is a mind-opener. The lectures were given by Japanese religious leaders and scholars to a group of North American Christian undergraduates who visited Japan. Included in the book is a record of two discussion sessions, which show the impact on the students of this unique learning experience.

This is a book for students of religion. The ordinary reader may tire of some of the details, nevertheless, those who persevere will be rewarded with a deeper understanding of both Shinto and Japanese Buddhism.

Pacific Island readers will find the relationship between religion and culture which is an ever-present theme throughout the lectures and the discussions, of special interest. The Gospel and Culture relationship has been a live issue for Pacific Island Christians over many years and is a burning question, which still needs deep study. The chapters on Shinto should be of particular interest for those who are seeking to regain the roots of their pre-Christian traditions and understandings. The origins

of Shinto go back over two thousand years and its ancient traditions are deeply embedded in the Japanese culture and attitudes to life of today.

Japan is a country within our Pacific Ocean, many Japanese are in our islands, and many more choose to travel among the islands as tourists. A better understanding of their belief should bring us closer to these people who are our neighbors.

Book Review: *Beyond Impunity*
An Ecumenical Approach to Truth, Justice and Reconciliation
by Genevieve Jacques

2000 World Council of Churches Publication, Geneva

Reviewed by Rev. Akuila D. Yabaki, Executive Director, Citizens' Constitutional Forum, Fiji

The book begins by defining the meaning of impunity as this has evolved in relation to events in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the midst of so much violations of human rights and human dignity, with systematic torture, disappearances, ethnic cleansing, and genocide unfolding before our eyes, the absence of punishment for heinous crimes against humanity is a matter of grave concern. This book addresses this concern. Absence of punishment is in fact the definition of impunity taken from a Latin word "impunitas".

The author Genevieve Jacques is Director of the Cluster on Relations in the World Council of Churches. She has written out of a rich background of ongoing ecumenical reflections under the World Council of Churches' Commission of Churches' International Affairs (CCIA). One of the strengths of ecumenical dialogue undertaken by and through the World Council is the rich and varied examples often



shared by the participants; there is always a vintage of living encounters of people from different situations across the world.

The heart of the message however is the churches' potential role as agents of reconciliation. Methodist Bishop Aldo Etchegoyen of Brazil offers a vivid illustration of how dangerous the struggle against impunity can be for the churches which find themselves in the midst of complex and critical situations which call for courage and clear thinking. He recounted how the religious leaders in Argentina were invited to be part of a government initiated National Commission of Peace and in due course were asked to put their signatures to a theological document linking forgiveness and pardon. He said the document offered pardon/forgiveness without repentance and without disclosure of what happened to the thousands of people who had been tortured and murdered. Bishop Aldo refused to sign. He said, "How could I have signed behind the back of the mothers and grandmothers..... representing the families that have suffered so much grief?"

To this kind of theological and ethical challenge many in society are looking to the churches and Christian communities for answer and support. But it's obvious to all and sundry that not all Churches or Christian communities have been so engaged. Why? There are two reasons offered for the lack of involvement by the churches. One is the lack of awareness of the issues, complex as they are; situations of conflict often call for analysis. This is where Study Centers can be of great service to the churches. The nearest example is the Fiji Council of Churches Research Group now called Ecumenical Center for Research, Education & Advocacy (ECREA) in Suva. But there are more established Centers dotted over the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lankan which are known to me personally. The other reason for the lack of involvement is the complicity of the institutions such as the churches with those who have committed violations of human rights and by their silence speak more of the grievous consequences of what the author referred to as "the poisonous impact of impunity" upon society.

Society expects churches to be moral reference points, "to speak clear and audible word – especially at times of great confusion over values, and when the population is exposed to distorted information". Christians both clergy and lay have been amongst those defenders of human rights demanding the truth and exposing official

lies at the risk of their lives.

There are obvious lessons here for Fiji and the Pacific. Particularly relevant is how the task becomes “more complicated in situations where violations are committed during conflicts whose communities are defined by their religion or ethnicity. Here the challenge for church leaders is to overcome the nationalistic, ethnic, partisan or other passions of their own members, so that the demand of the universal message of the gospel can be heard.” The same view was echoed by Bishop Jabez Bryce, Bishop of Polynesia in a letter addressed to an overseas partner church: “Church leaders are anxious to avoid causing further deep divisions among people. They know that persistent calls for justice and human rights are likely to be misunderstood by many and interpreted as ‘political’”.

In Chapter 2 of the book the author speaks of truth and memory as they are often related through telling stories. The telling of stories by survivors and relatives is an irreplaceable requirement for the healing process to begin. By simply telling their stories the survivors of concentration camps at the end of the Second World War have experienced release from the intense need to speak, to write, to witness and to expose the horror of what they had been through.

The story reveals the truth of the events which have wounded individuals and establish a shared memory which are necessary in order to establish “our relationship to the truth.” On the other hand the granting of impunity to those known to be guilty will deny our relationship to the truth.

Where are they? The haunting question which the families of the disappeared never stop asking the authorities. Never Again! Upon hearing the story it is hoped the churches might become involved in a process of preventive education.

In Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Chile attempts to piece together bits of information on the serious crimes committed during their military dictatorships have exposed the guilt of those involved.

South Africa under President Nelson Mandela is the only government that has broken the silence and the author provides essential details of the widely known



Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). As an Inquiry held in public and before television cameras TRC has become one of historical significance and posing ethical challenges to the rest of the world.

Established on 26 July 1995 by the National Unity and Reconciliation Act TRC stipulates the pursuit of national unity and the well being of South African citizens through reconciliation between people of South Africa. Under the watchword "Truth is the way to Reconciliation" the TRC spent two and half years conducting numerous public hearings to listen to victims and to those directly responsible, or their accomplices under the apartheid regime. More than 20,000 witnesses were heard. And the examination of conscience, which ensued, provided a real catharsis for the entire society. TRC submitted its 3000-page report to Nelson Mandela on 29 October, 1998.

Another commission which is cited in the book is the Guatemalan Commission on Historical Clarification. The 3600 page report, The Memory of Silence, was made public on 25 February, 1999. This commission was established under the Oslo peace accords, signed by parties to the armed conflict, under the United Nations in June 1994. Three experts one from Germany and two from Guatemala, were mandated by the UN, the commission spent 18 months questioning victims and witnesses of violation of human rights and consulting great many sources of information, including certain CIA Archives made available by the US government. The commission was to clarify with objectivity ... it was not established to judge – that is the function of the courts if law – but rather to clarify the history and the events of more than three decades of fratricidal war.

Several other governments have sought to distance themselves officially from the practices of the past by setting up truth commissions to shed light on the past; these are Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Haiti, Chad, Ethiopia, the former GDR, Hungary, the Philippines and Uganda. At another level the United Nations itself has set up truth commissions as part of the peace agreements that ended armed conflicts.

The author makes the point that Reports could easily be filed away. Governments must take the recommendations seriously. In South Africa the process does not end with the publication of the report. There are those opposed to the revelation

of their own misdeeds. The minority white party called the report a scandal, the ANC was indignant to see itself implicated in cases of torture and mistreatment of prisoners.

National and international pressures of public opinion are needed to ensure that the work of these Commissions are disseminated to people that they may have the right to know and the revelations fully accepted by the authorities.

Justice

In this whole struggle against impunity in all its complex aspects Justice has a central place. This is sought at two levels :

- The victims need public recognition of the wrongs they have suffered and need to see those responsible identified, named and held to account. Secondly society as a whole needs laws based on shared values and institutions to be in place to manage the rule of law and assurances from the authorities that law will be equitably enforced. Justice goes well beyond the confines of the system of criminal justice and must take into account the need to reform social systems which exclude the poor and the voiceless.

In a nutshell the author says, "When the justice system fails to respond or exempts certain categories of criminals from accountability to the law, this calls into question the credibility not only of the legal institutions but ultimately the rule of law itself." (p.35) Criminal justice through the actions of the judicial system can mark a fundamental symbolic break with the practices of the past by showing that such crimes will not be tolerated in the future, irrespective of the political or social status of those who commit them. Here the process of educating public opinion by affirming the supremacy of law over vengeance and dissuading the public from repetition of such crimes because they will not be tolerated is extremely important. It will go a long way towards arresting "the cycle of offence – resentment – hatred – revenge" which poisons memories and perpetuates group violence.

Justice and Reconciliation

Justice – the rule of law, respect for and obedience to the law – is the foundation of democratic society. It is essential to lasting peace within and between societies and nations. "For the Christian justice understood in legal terms is a stage on the



way to the more fundamental goal of reconciliation".

Reconciliation, always a matter of urgency, is nevertheless not to be a rushed or quick fix operation but a movement, a process of restoring broken relationships between individuals and peoples. It seeks to heal not just the present ruptured relationships, but also the sources of conflict which are latent in previous, superficially harmonious relationships. It fixes its attention less on the past and more towards the future.

"Beyond Impunity" published in a booklet size is an account of different attempts in different places to come to terms with crimes against humanity. It is a timely contribution to ongoing struggles to deal with impunity and how the courts and legal systems could come under examination in dealing with impunity.

In the final chapter it deals with the prospect of reconciliation. The essential elements are truth, justice, forgiveness and repentance. So these are not confined to the legal, political domain but bring us to the ethical and spiritual dimensions and are fundamental. It raises several questions for peoples of conscience including leaders in the churches, pointing out once again that churches and religious faiths have a crucial responsibility. Nelson Mandela quoted in a French newspaper Le Monde (7th august, 1999) said that "the search of reconciliation has been a fundamental objective in the struggle to establish a government based on the will of the people and to build a South Africa that belongs to all its people." So the theme of the book truth, justice and reconciliation are not rarefied themes but the very spur that leads to transformation, the conversion of minds and hearts that leads directly to transformation of political, economic and social structures which distort human relations and to the healing of memories.



Book Review: *The Rainbow Spirit in Creation. A Reading of Genesis 1*. Translated and edited by Norman Habel for the Rainbow Spirit Elders.

Artist Jasmine Corowa, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000

Reviewed by Anthony Tony

This is a fascinating book for anyone interested in the richness and challenge that encounter with other cultures can bring to the expression of the traditional Judaeo-Christian faith. The works of art by one of their own daughters, Jasmine Corowa, vividly contextualize the creation story in Genesis 1 within the culture and myths of the indigenous Rainbow Spirit People from Queensland, Australia. Painting and text are arranged on facing pages. The paintings help explore more deeply the text which has been translated from the language of the people themselves, rather than taken from one of the more common English translations of the Bible. An example of the fresh spirit of the translation is to be found in the final words of the book: "This is the family story about when sky and land were created." Although the vibrant colors and figures of the paints speak for themselves a brief explanation of the significance of each painting is provided.

The challenging quality of the aboriginal theological approach to the creation story is expressed in the description given in the 'blurb' on the back of the jacket:

*Viewing the Creator as within the earth, not somewhere outside it,
Aboriginal Christians use the land as a starting point for their theology –
the land from where they believe their ancestors emerged and for which
they feel responsible as custodians of the sacred.*

The reader, interested in understanding more about the beliefs of these people, is referred to their book Rainbow Spirit Theology (Blackburn, Australia, 1997). Not only readers interested in the creative interface between traditional cultures and Christian theology, but anyone open to having their faith and spirituality opened up by encounter with other traditions, will enjoy this book and find that it will deepen their own appreciation of God and creation.



Pacific Journal of Theology

Policy Statement

The Pacific Journal of Theology is published twice yearly by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. It seeks to stimulate theological thinking and writing by Christians living in or familiar with the South Pacific, and to share these reflections with church and theological education communities, and with all who want to be challenged to reflect critically on their faith in changing times. Opinions and claims made by contributors to the Journal are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools.

The Editorial Board welcomes various kinds of writing which express an emerging Pacific theology. These may include:

- Original articles in the theological disciplines;
- Articles relating theological thinking to Pacific cultures, contemporary issues, and other academic disciplines;
- Helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational);
- Artistic expressions of the Christian faith (poetry, visual art, music);
- Notes and reviews of books which are relevant for Pacific Christians;
- Information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.

Notes for Contributors

The Editor will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard and in keeping with the overall policy of this Journal. Poetry, photographs, black and white drawings are also welcome. Articles should be clearly typed in double spacing on one side of the paper only. Any sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in endnotes and a bibliography at the end of the article, including author, title, city, publisher,

and date of publication. Please include brief autobiographical data.

Author's Agreement Form

The Editorial Board requires a signed Author's Agreement form from the contributor of any item in the Journal. This agreement gives legal protection and copyright to the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. A form will be sent to the author following acceptance of a contribution.

Language

The Editorial Board will accept articles in French and Pacific languages with an abstract in English language.





Notice Board

Consultations, Study Projects, etc. in the Region

“Towards a Culture of Peace”

*Strategies for peace-building Workshop to be held in Fiji in October, 2001; organized by ECREA
(Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy - formerly FCC Research Group)*

“Ethnic Identity, National Identity & the Search for Unity of the Church”

A study project for WCC's Commission on Faith & Order currently being undertaken in Fiji.

“Who is my Neighbour, my Sister, my Brother”

ECREA study in response to the present situation in Fiji.

“Racism in the Pacific”

A study which has been completed for the WCC's Justice and Peace program.

“Pacific Contextual Theology”

Viability of Theological Education. Four-year study being undertaken by SPATS. First conference from 8th - 12th October, 2001 at the CATD Training Centre, Nadave.

“Capacity Building”

God's Pacific People Programme; 2nd Consultation of a series of five, at Tradewinds Hotel, Suva from 18th - 21st September, 2001. Sponsored by GPP & WCC Pacific Desk



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